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Pragg beats Gukesh to win Tata Chess title

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 4 FEBRUARY 2025 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 5 SHABAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 35| Pages: 8

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SC bins plea alleging misuse of dowry laws

The apex court said concerns around laws should be raised in Parliament

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a plea challenging certain provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act and alleging misuse of women-centric laws.

"You can go and raise all these grounds in Parliament," a bench of Justices B R Gavai and K Vinod Chandran told the counsel appearing for the petitioner.

The petitioner's counsel said they were seeking to challenge certain provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, including sections 2 and 3.

While section 2 of the Act deals with definition of dowry, section 3 pertains to penalty for giving or taking dowry.

The counsel said the petitioner was concerned about these laws which adversely impacts men.

The public interest litigation (PIL) names laws like the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, and the provision on cruelty to women in the erstwhile Indian Penal Code to question their validity.

- The petitioner's counsel said they were seeking to challenge certain provisions of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. ncluding sections 2 and 3.

The plea filed by petitioner Rupshi Singh highlighted the alleged malice in law, the unreasonableness contained in the impugned provisions and the lack of semblance of law in the provisions.

The petitioner was seeking protection of men against the atrocities committed by women filing false complaints, abusing the very laws that were meant to protect them from harm.

The PIL submitted that the Dowry Prohibition Act was discriminatory on the grounds of religion and further assailed the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 as being women-centric and discriminatory against men. *—PTI*

OPPN WALKS OUT IN LS

In RS, Kharge says 1,000s died in Kumbh

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday paid tribute to those who died in the Maha Kumbh stampede in Prayagraj on January 29, stating "thousands" had perished. His remarks sparked protests from the treasury benches, with Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar urging him to retract the statement.

Kharge clarified that the figure of "thousands" was his estimate and urged the government to provide the correct numbers, acknowledging that if he was wrong, he was ready to be corrected. The Uttar Pradesh government reported 30 deaths and 60 injuries in the stampede during the Amrit Snan on Mauni Amavasya.

As the opposition, led by Congress, demanded a discussion on the tragedy, they stormed the well of the House, leading to noisy protests. During a debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Kharge also criticized the government for neglecting the poor, citing inflation and unemployment.

Kharge's comments led to a tense exchange with BJP MP Neeraj Shekhar, prompting the Leader of Opposition to angrily respond, referencing his relationship with Shekhar's father, former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. Chairman Dhankhar appealed for calm and urged Kharge to withdraw his comments, but Kharge stood by his remarks.

The ruling BJP on the other hand said it smelt a conspiracy behind the stampede and that those responsible for it will have to hang their heads in shame once the probe is over.. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal campaign in Delhi on Monday **PHOTO: X**

High-octane campaign ends in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

As campaigning for the Delhi Assembly elections concludes at 5pm on Monday, parties gear up for a fierce electoral battle, with voting scheduled for 5 February. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has organised 22 roadshows and rallies, aiming to reclaim power after over 25 years. In contrast, the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is confident of securing a third consecutive term, leveraging its governance through free welfare schemes.

Amidst intense political rhetoric, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal alleged the BJP might face its worst defeat ever and warned voters of alleged intimidation tactics by the BJP, claiming they plan to use their "goons" and the Delhi Police to sway results. He urged voters to reject bribes and not allow their fingers to be marked for manipulation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi countered AAP's claims, asserting that the government's education policies restrict students' progression based on prior performance, compromising their futures for political appearances. The Congress presented itself as a viable alternative, accusing both AAP and BJP of mismanagement and corruption. Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav vowed to restore the city's glory reminiscent of former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's era. The party's leaders emphasised infrastructure, clean water, and employment opportunities for all communities. As over 1.56 crore voters prepare to cast their ballots across 13,766 polling stations, the outcome will be unveiled on 8 February, determining Delhi's future. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Manipur violence: SC seeks lab report on CM's audio clips

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has ordered a sealed-cover forensic report regarding the authenticity of leaked audio recordings allegedly implicating Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh in the region's ethnic violence. The court characterised the situation as "limping back to normalcy" and instructed the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) to submit its findings in six weeks. A bench led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna sought the report following a plea from the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust, who is calling for a court-monitored Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the chief minister's alleged involvement in the unrest. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

BIG DAY AT MAHA KUMBH

Sadhvis take a holy dip at the Sangam on Basant Panchami during Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Monday **PHOTO: PTI** *>>>More on Pages 3 &4*

BEYONCE FINALLY WINS ALBUM OF YEAR AT GRAMMYS

LOS ANGELES, 3 FEB

Beyonce has won album of the year for 'Cowboy Carter' at the 2025 Grammys, delivering her — at last — the show's elusive top award.

The superstar, who is both the most awarded and nominated artist in Grammys history, has been up for the category four times before and many feel she has been snubbed by its top honours.

In winning album of the year, Beyonce has become the first Black woman to win the top prize in the 21st century.

"It's been many, many years," Beyonce said in her speech. "I want to dedicate this to Ms Martell," she said, referencing Linda Martell, the performer who became the first Black woman to play the Grand Ole Opry.

Kendrick Lamar won song and record of the year for his diss track 'Not Like Us', taking home two of the night's most prestigious awards. "We're gonna dedicate this one to the city," Lamar said before shouting out Los Angeles area neighborhoods. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

BEST NEW ARTIST: Chappell Roan

BEST POP VOCAL ALBUM: 'Short n' Sweet', Sabrina Carpenter

BEST RAP SONG AND PERFORMANCE: 'Not Like Us', Kendrick Lamar

RECORD, SONG, MUSIC VIDEO OF THE YEAR: Not Like Us, Kendrick Lamar

ALBUM OF THE YEAR: Cowboy Carter, Beyoncé

'NOT LIKE US' is the most Grammy awarded rap song ever with 5 wins

D-street bleeds as Trump's tariffs hit markets

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

Benchmark stock indices, the Sensex and Nifty, closed lower on Monday, following a downturn in global markets driven by concerns over potential tariffs from US President Donald Trump on various trading partners. The 30-share BSE Sensex fell by 319.22 points, or 0.41 per cent, ending at 77,186.74, effectively breaking a five-day positive streak. At its lowest, the index dropped by 749.87 points intra-day. The NSE Nifty, too, saw a decline, slipping 121.10 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at 23,361.05.

Key laggards among Sensex shares included major players such as Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, and Reliance Industries. In contrast, Bajaj Finance surged by over 5 per cent, with other gainers including Mahindra & Mahindra and Bharti Airtel.

Market experts attributed the slump to increased investor pessimism amid the announcement of substantial tariffs on imports from China, Mexico, and Canada, set to take effect on Tuesday. The looming 'Trade War' has raised concerns over broader economic repercussions. Additionally, the rupee's sharp depreciation has prompted fears of sustained selling by foreign investors. With 2,877 stocks declining against 1,139 advancing on the BSE, the outlook remains cautious amidst growing global financial risks. *—PTI*

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Sri Lankan Navy arrests 10 Indian fishermen

COLOMBO, 3 FEB

Sri Lankan authorities arrested 10 Indian fishermen and seized their boat for allegedly venturing into the territorial waters of the island nation, the Navy said on Monday. The development comes days after two Indian fishermen sustained serious injuries during the apprehension of 13 Indian fishermen in the proximity of Delft Island by the Sri Lankan Navy. The arrests took place during a special operation conducted south of Mannar on Sunday. Last week, five Indian fishermen sustained injuries, including two seriously, in an incident of firing by the Sri Lankan Navy in the proximity of Delft Island, triggering a strong reaction by India. *—PTI*

IN K'TAKA

Now, visually challenged can read Constitution in Braille

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Governor of Karnataka Thawarchand Gehlot launched on Monday a Braille-enabled version of the Indian Constitution, to mark 75 years of the Constitution.

The project was done in collaboration with Sankara Eye Hospital Bengaluru and CII Young Indians (Yi) Bengaluru.

"This initiative aims to empower those who are blind or have low vision by enabling them to read and understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens," said Dr Kaushik Murali, President of Medical Administration, Quality & Education at Sankara Eye Foundation India, in a press statement issued on Monday.

The Braille version will be distributed to key institutions, ensuring wider access, he added.

Darshan Mutha, National Chair of Accessibility at CII Young Indians, said the initiative aims to raise awareness about the importance of inclusivity and create a more accessible world for all. *—PTI*

SC lets disabled candidates to use scribes for exams

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has ruled that all candidates with disabilities will be allowed to bring scribes for their examinations, regardless of whether they meet the benchmark disability criteria, which requires a minimum of 40 per cent disability.

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan emphasised that the Centre must ensure proper implementation of this directive. The court noted that guidelines issued by the government following its previous orders should be extended to all persons with disabilities (PwD), not just those classified as having benchmark disabilities (PwBD).

The Supreme Court directed the Centre to review an office memorandum from 10 August, 2022, to eliminate existing restrictions and to grant necessary relaxations. All recruitment agencies and examining bodies are required to adhere to these guidelines and ensure compliance through regular surveys and verifications.

Further, the court called for awareness programmes in educational institutions, alongside establishing a grievance redressal portal for candidates to lodge complaints prior to seeking legal recourse.

It also instructed the Centre to extend the validity of scribe certificates from six months, allowing time for candidates, especially in rural areas, to acclimatise to their scribes before examinations.

Authorities have been given a two-month deadline to implement these directives. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

1 dead, 2 missing after car falls into Mandya canal

MYSURU, 3 FEB

Three persons are feared drowned and two went missing while another was rescued after the car in which they were travelling skidded off the road and plunged into Visvesvaraya Canal near Thibbanahalli in Pandavapura taluk on Monday afternoon. Police have recovered the body of Fayaz, 41, the owner of the car. A search is on for Peerkhan and Aslam Pasha, who also were in the car. The fourth passenger, Nayaz, managed to stay afloat and was rescued by the police. All victims of the mishap hail from Halahalli colony in Mandya city. The incident took place when they were returning to the city from Pandavapura. Shivalli Police, who have recovered removed the car from the canal, registered a case and intensified the search for the missing persons. Sources said the Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited (CNNL) has been urged to stop the flow of water to the canal till the bodies are traced out. *—Salar News*

Tea vendor ends life over friend's debt

MYSURU, 3 FEB

Siddesh, 40, a tea shop owner from Mallupura village, Nanjangud, died by suicide on Sunday. He hanged himself from a tree near Varuna, Mysuru taluk. In a video circulated to friends, Siddesh explained his distress over a bank loan he took for his friend, Manikanta, of Uppinamole village, and a ₹2 lakh hand loan from moneylenders, also for his friend. Manikanta's failure to repay the loan and mounting pressure from the bank led to Siddesh taking his own life, leaving behind his wife and two children. *—Salar News*

Teen goes swimming with friends, drowns

MYSURU, 3 FEB

A 17-year-old youth, identified as Samarth from Veeranapura, Gundlupet taluk, drowned at a lake near Hosamutty, Chikkalur pilgrim centre, on Sunday. Samarth, who had camped overnight with relatives at Siddappaji temple, went swimming with friends when the incident occurred. Kollegal rural police, along with fire department personnel, recovered his body after a seven-hour search operation. The body was then handed over to his family after a post-mortem at Kollegal Suburban Hospital. A case has been registered by the police. *—Salar News*

Archbishop Peter Machado elected Vice Prez of CCBI

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Archbishop Peter Machado of Bengaluru has been elected Vice President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) during its 36th Plenary Assembly at XIM University,

Bhubaneswar. The assembly, which began on 28 January and concludes on 4 February, also re-elected Cardinal Felipe Neri Ferrão as President and appointed Archbishop Vincent Aind of Ranchi as Secretary General.Archbishop Machado, 70, has been serving as Metropolitan Archbishop of Bengaluru since 2018. His election reflects recognition of his leadership, particularly in interfaith dialogue, education, and social justice. The Archdiocese of Bengaluru congratulated him and pledged prayers *—Salar News*

State braces for more heat as mercury touches 30°C

Usual temperature for February is around 25°C to 26°C

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

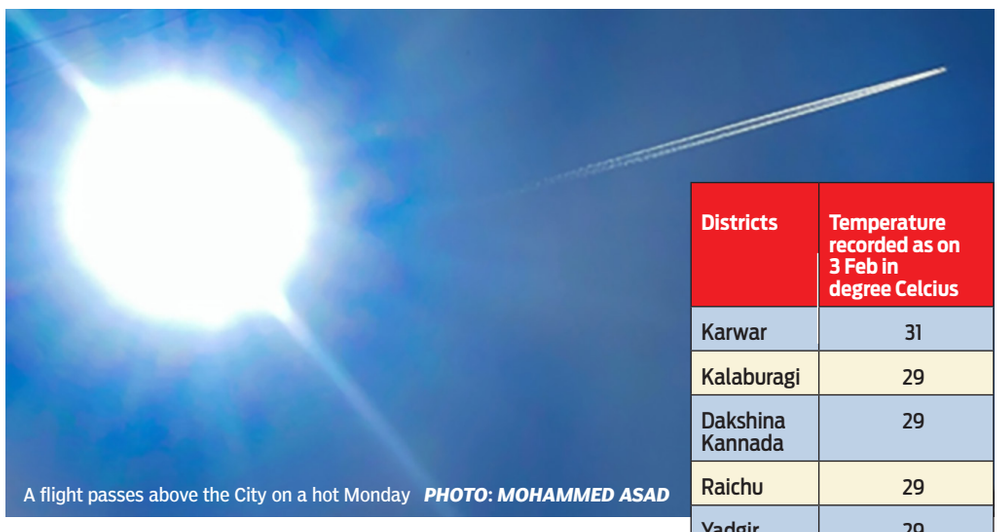
The city is experiencing a notable shift in its weather patterns as winter gives way to unseasonably warm conditions. Over the past week, residents have reported maximum temperatures around 30°C, a marked increase from the usual February highs of 25°C to 26°C.

Meteorologist CS Patil warns that this trend could signal intensifying heat beginning in March, with temperatures possibly reaching 29°C. On Monday, the city recorded a temperature of 28.01°C, accompanied by 14 per cent humidity and wind speeds of 14 kilometres per hour.

This early onset of summer is not confined to Bengaluru; North Karnataka districts are also witnessing similar temperature rises. Historically, the highest temperatures in these areas are recorded in April and May, but this year, warmer conditions could emerge as soon as March. Experts advise residents to take precautions in the coming weeks, recommending that outdoor activities be limited between 12pm and 3pm to mitigate health risks associated with the heat.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasts continued warm days, with temperatures expected to climb to 30.06°C.

On Tuesday, 4 February, Bengaluru is predicted to reach a high of 31°C and a low of 16°C, with intermittent cloud cover expected. Residents are urged to stay hydrated and limit sun exposure as the heatwave approaches. *—Salar News*



A flight passes above the City on a hot Monday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Districts	Temperature recorded as on 3 Feb in degree Celcius
Karwar	31
Kalaburagi	29
Dakshina Kannada	29
Raichu	29
Yadgir	29
Ballari	29
Panambur	28
Bidar	28
Mysuru	27
Bengaluru	26

DYCM'S PROMISE

Govt to bring law for microfinance firms

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar announced on Monday that the Karnataka government will introduce an ordinance aimed at curbing the exploitation of the poor by microfinance companies engaging in aggressive loan recovery practices. Speaking at his residence in Sadashivanagar, Shivakumar stated that the government would not tolerate harassment and would enable police to take decisive action against offenders.

Shivakumar revealed that FIRs have been filed against several microfinance institutions across Belagavi, Bidar, Mysuru, and Ramanagara, following stern directives from the Chief Minister. The ordinance is set to be submitted to the Governor shortly, and local helplines will be established in every district. Responding to recent comments by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman regarding state debt, Shivakumar defended Karnataka's financial management, urging clarity on Centre allocations in the upcoming Union Budget. *—Salar News*

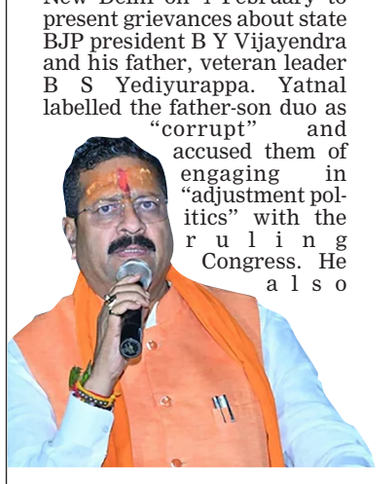
Man dies by suicide over mother's debt

A 25-year-old man in Bidar has died by suicide, apparently driven to despair by his mother's debt to a bank. Ganesh, of Rampur village in Chitguppa Taluk, took his own life at his home when no one else was present. His mother, Mahadevi, had borrowed Rs 5 lakh from the Humnabad Taluk SBI Bank and was stressed over repaying the loan. Unable to bear his mother's distress, Ganesh took this extreme step.

Yatnal-led delegation to meet BJP high command in Delhi

VIJAYAPURA, 3 FEB

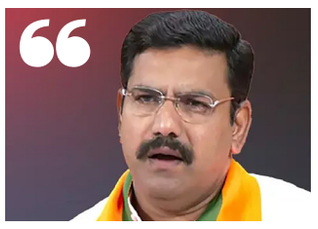
Senior BJP legislator Basanagouda Patil Yatnal announced he and other loyal party leaders would travel to New Delhi on 4 February to present grievances about state BJP president B Y Vijayendra and his father, veteran leader B S Yediyurappa. Yatnal labelled the father-son duo as "corrupt" and accused them of engaging in "adjustment politics" with the ruling Congress. He also called for an end to nepotism in the party.



"We will tell the BJP leadership about Yediyurappa and his son's actions," Yatnal stated, questioning whether the party wanted a "corrupt family" or "honest, loyal workers." He stressed three key issues: removing the corrupt family from leadership, avoiding dynasty politics, and ensuring the party's future was led by true Hindutva followers. Yatnal also criticised the state BJP leadership for its inadequate response to the killings of Hindu activists, claiming the lack of action had damaged the party's standing.

Yatnal noted that more party leaders, previously neutral, had joined his faction after realising that Vijayendra's leadership would harm the BJP's prospects. He also accused Vijayendra of "adjustment politics" with Congress, tion-related cases against the Yediyurappas if they spoke out against the ruling party.

Vijayendra, appointed state BJP president in November 2023, has faced internal dissent, with senior leaders like Yatnal and Ramesh Jarkiholi criticising his leadership. *—Salar News*



I'm confident that with the cooperation of everyone, I will continue as the state President and will work to strengthen the party. I have complete faith

-BY Vijayendra, BJP Chief

2 boys sexually assault girl in Mandya school

MANDYA, 3 FEB

An eight-year-old girl has alleged that she was sexually assaulted by two boys inside the washroom of her school in Mandya, police said on Monday. The alleged incident occurred on 31 January and the complaint was filed on Sunday.

A senior police officer said the girl – a class two student in a government school -- claimed that two boys took her to a washroom where they made her remove her clothes and then thrashed her with a stick. They also beat her on her private parts. One of the boys she identified is her classmate while another is from a higher class, he said. Based on the statement of the girl, a case was registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act against the two boys and an investigation is underway, said Mandya Superintendent of Police Mallikarjun Baladandi. *—PTI*

Postgraduate student found dead at B'luru University

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

In a shocking turn of events, a 22-year-old postgraduate student at Bengaluru University was found dead in her hostel room on Monday afternoon. Pavana HN, who was pursuing a Master's degree in Kannada Studies, was discovered by her roommates at the Ramabai Girls' Hostel. It is alleged that she had attended a college programme earlier in the day but had left before returning to her room.

The Jnanabharathi police have launched an investigation into the circumstances of her death, which is still uncertain. A case has been registered under the Unnatural Death Report at Jnanabharathi Police Station, and her body has been sent for post-mortem examination at Victoria Hospital. In another incident, the Soladevanahalli police discovered an unidentified woman's body behind an under-construction building on Monday morning. The deceased, estimated to be around 35 years old, had likely died over three days ago, with her body decomposing. *—Salar News*

SC relief to Kateel in Electoral Bonds case

NEW DELHI. 3 FEB

Supreme Court on Monday upheld the Karnataka High Court's decision to quash criminal proceedings against Naleen Kumar Kateel, former Karnataka BJP president, in connection with extortion allegations linked to the electoral bond scheme. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar dismissed an appeal filed by Adarsh R Iyer of the "Janaadhikaaara Sangharsha Parishath," challenging the High Court's December 2024 verdict.

The High Court had previously ruled that the complaint lacked legal standing and did not establish a prima facie case of extortion. The bench stated there were no specific allegations or material to support the claims and refused to allow a "roving inquiry." Advocate Prasant Bhushan, representing Iyer, had argued that money was extracted using agencies like the Enforcement Directorate, but the bench said it could not proceed without concrete evidence. *—PTI*

'Middle-class tax cut masks fall in growth'

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

Former MP and Chairman of the All India Congress Committee's Research Department, MV Rajeev Gowda, said on Monday that the 'middle-class tax cut' was a diversion created to conceal the decline in growth from 8.2 per cent last year to 6.4 per cent this year.

Gowda said that despite the brouhaha over raising the no-tax bracket to Rs 12 lakh, Union Budget will not boost growth.

"The government claims that the tax cut will drive consumption. However, the tax cut will have an impact only on 3 crore taxpayers, mainly in urban India. The majority of Indians will still not be able to spend more, as they are hurting from stagnant real wages and bearing the burden of increased loans," said Gowda, in a press release.

Congress protests in City on Monday against the Union Budget 2025, alleging that the State has been denied key projects and grants. CM Siddaramaiah had said Karnataka got nothing but 'Khali Chombu' PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

According to him, masses need a reduction in petroleum taxes or a cut in GST to increase consumption.

He also said that the private sector is not investing enough in India because the government favours only a few companies that dominate 40 sectors of industry.

Gowda also said that the allocations for SCs, STs, OBCs, and minorities have been cut considerably, showing that the government's priorities lie with urban, upper-class, and upper-caste Indians.

He said that although the budget projects a real GDP growth rate of 6.3 per cent, even this is not going to be achieved as we are entering a period of tremendous uncertainty in the global economic landscape.. *—PTI*

NEW RULES IN CITY

Riding on footpath may cost you licence

BENGALURU, 3 FEB

In a concerted effort to combat the increasing instances of traffic violations, the Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) announced stricter measures on Monday targeting those driving on footpaths.

Despite numerous appeals for compliance with traffic regulations, certain motorists continue to disregard these rules, endangering pedestrians. As a result, senior traffic police officials have instituted a new policy: vehicles found driving on footpaths will face immediate penalties, and habitual offenders risk having their driving licences revoked.

In the initial phase, fines will be imposed. However, for those who continue to violate the rules, the traffic police will recommend the suspension of their driving licences to the Regional Transport Officer (RTO). The current fines for driving on footpaths are set at Rs 1,000 for two-wheelers and three-wheelers, Rs 2,000 for light motor vehicles (LMV), and Rs 5,000 for other types of vehicles. The police have urged motorists to reconsider their actions, emphasising that such conduct will not be tolerated.

The current fines for driving on footpaths are set at Rs 1,000 for two-wheelers and three-wheelers, Rs 2,000 for light motor vehicles (LMV), and Rs 5,000 for other types of vehicles PHOTO: X

Additionally, motorists have expressed concerns over the state government's decision to reinstate the vehicle-towing policy in Bengaluru. Home Minister Dr G Parameshwara confirmed this move last Wednesday, noting that the towing system had been temporarily suspended due to complaints of harassment from vehicle owners. While the government aims to revise the towing rules, details regarding charges and staff conduct remain undisclosed. The BTP has indicated that special training will be provided for towing personnel before the policy is reintroduced. *—Salar News*

Mysuru opposes bus stand at Banni Mantap

MYSURU, 3 FEB

The business community in Mysuru on Monday opposed the state government's decision to build a Rs 120 crore KSRTC bus stand at Banni Mantap to relocate the one behind Peoples Park on Bengaluru–Mysuru road, saying that it will adversely affect visitors to the city, including tourists.

In a press conference, the KSRTC Sub Urban Bus Stand Ulisi Horata Samithi, Mysuru District Travels Association, Hotels Owners Association, Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industries and Builders Association expressed their opposition to the state government move to shift the bus stand to Banni Mantap.

Mysuru district Hotel Owners Association president C Narayanagowda said relocating the bus stand is not the solution to ease the traffic problems in the city centre.

Instead, the state government must expand the existing bus stand by using the unused space of the park near the bus stand, Narayanagowda said. He said about 65 acres of the park's land is lying unused.

Mysuru city witnesses traffic congestions only during weekends, holidays, dasara, and the tourist season in May, not throughout the year, he said.

Horata Samithi chief Ravi Shastry said four satellite bus stands built using NURM funds at Satagalli, Kuvempu Nagar, Ilwal and Naidu Nagar have become defunct.

Instead of constructing new ones, the state government should use these existing facilities for the benefit of the people, he said.

He said that Samithi has already brought to the notice of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah their opposition to the decision of shifting the bus stand at Banni Mantap. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Delhi HC summons Tharoor in defamation case

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Monday summoned Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on a defamation plea filed by BJP leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar. In his suit, Chandrasekhar claimed Tharoor made false and defamatory statements at various public fora in April 2024 that severely damaged his professional and personal reputation. Chandrasekhar has sought to restrain Tharoor from making any defamatory statements. Justice Purushaindra Kumar Kaurav posted the matter on 28 April. While seeking a public apology, he sought Rs 10 crore in damages from Tharoor for allegedly defaming and tarnishing his reputation. *—PTI*

Congress leader's son found dead in Patna

PATNA, 3 FEB

The son of senior Congress leader Shakeel Ahmed Khan was found dead in Patna on Monday, police said. The body of Ayaan Ahmad Khan was found hanging from a ceiling fan at the official residence of his father, the Bihar Congress Legislature Party leader, in Sachiwalaya area, a senior officer said. Speaking to PTI, Patna Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Awkash Kumar said, "Senior officials along with forensic experts have reached the spot and are collecting scientific evidence. The matter is being investigated from all angles." The body has been sent for post-mortem examination, he said, adding that the exact cause of death was yet to be ascertained. Khan is the MLA of Kadwa assembly seat in Katihar district. *—PTI*

Delhi HC refuses urgent hearing against 'freebies'

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Delhi High Court on Monday refused to grant urgent hearing to a plea alleging violation of election laws by political parties ahead of assembly polls in the national capital. A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said the matter would be heard in the normal course whenever it was listed. The petitioner's counsel sought urgent listing of the case at 2.00pm. "It will be listed as per the standing order. We are not saying anything on merit," the court said. "Whatever impact the freebies were to have has already happened," the court remarked. The petitioner's counsel objected to the announcement of "freebies" by the political parties and said the entire election process was being conducted in violation of the law. *—PTI*

Final showdown: BJP, AAP & Cong clash

BJP accuses AAP of turning Delhi into 'dirty slum'; Cong promises to restore Delhi's glory

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi with party candidate Abhishek Dutt during a roadshow ahead of the Delhi Assembly election, at Kotla Mubarakpur in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

BJP Rajya Sabha member Kiran Choudhry on Monday accused AAP of turning Delhi into a "dirty slum," saying the party was making excuses and blaming others for the city's poor state. Initiating a discussion on the motion of thanks in the Rajya Sabha, Choudhry stated that AAP had lost the trust of Delhi's residents.

Without naming Arvind Kejriwal, she criticised AAP leaders for using terms like "water terrorism" and "genocide," equating them to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, claiming they had lost their senses as the people grew tired of their non-performance.

Delhi left behind as AAP kept fighting with Centre: Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that states with a BJP double-engine government had progressed in the last decade, while Delhi had been left behind due to AAP's constant "excuses" and "fighting with the Centre."

BJP national president JP Nadda also attacked AAP, asserting that the upcoming election was a battle for Delhi's future. He claimed AAP had been "patronising" illegal migrants, which he alleged was affecting the electoral process.

Cong attacks AAP & BJP, promises to restore glory

Meanwhile, on the final day of campaigning for Delhi's Assembly elections, Congress launched its own attack on AAP and BJP, positioning itself as the only viable alternative to restore Delhi's former glory under Sheila Dikshit's leadership.

Congress accused the Kejriwal government of mismanaging funds, failing on governance, and allowing the city's infrastructure to deteriorate.

> **Delhi development is possible only if God comes down on Earth or such miracles can be done by Modi ji**
> -Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, Lok Sabha member

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav promised to bring back the city's world-class roads, clean water, and efficient governance.

Sandeep Dikshit criticised AAP's claims of world-class education and healthcare, particularly its Mohalla Clinics, which he said failed during the pandemic.

Congress also accused both AAP and BJP of turning the election into a money-driven contest with cash and gifts being distributed to sway voters.

They emphasised that the Congress government would focus on real work for the city's progress, especially for marginalised communities. *—PTI*

Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah with Delhi BJP chief Virender Sachdeva during a public meeting for Delhi Assembly elections, at Jangpura, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

AAP leader Manish Sisodia during a roadshow ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Anti-Conversion bill tabled in Rajasthan assembly

JAIPUR, 3 FEB

The Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill, 2025, was introduced in the state Assembly during the ongoing Budget Session on Monday. Health Minister Gajendra Singh Khinvsar presented the legislation, which seeks to outlaw unlawful religious conversions.

Under the proposed law, offences will be classified as cognisable and non-bailable, with trials conducted in court.

The Bill stipulates severe penalties, with imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines reaching Rs 50,000 for violations. Key provisions include specific punishments for conversions achieved through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, or coercion, resulting in imprisonment of one to five years and fines of up to Rs 15,000.

Particularly harsh penalties are outlined for offences involving minors, women, or individuals from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, with potential sentences ranging from two years to ten years and fines up to Rs 25,000. In cases of mass conversion, offenders could face imprisonment of three to ten years and fines of Rs 50,000. *—PTI*

DMK denies Palaniswami's 'party flag' claim in car chase

CHENNAI, 3 FEB

DMK leader and Law Minister S Regupathy has demanded to know whether AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami would apologise for levelling a baseless allegation against his party over the East Coast Road car chase incident, as an accused in the case has admitted in a video clip doing rounds in the social media, that he belonged to an AIADMK family.

Citing the video aired by some television channels, Regupathy, in a post on 'X' said that those who tried to carry on with selfish politics by alleging a DMK flag in a SUV of the accused and using it to make allegations against his party were now exposed. Chandru, who was arrested in the case, has confessed to his AIADMK family background.

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

A video clip in which he admits this has been released by the media, he said.

In a video clip doing the rounds on social media, Chandru, one of the accused in the car chase incident on the East Coast Road could be heard purportedly saying that his uncle is an office-bearer in the AIADMK and grandfather too was an AIADMK man.

Last month, a video went viral that showed some women in a car being chased and intimidated by men in a SUV with a "DMK flag." *—PTI*

Oppn seeks liability on Kumbh stampede

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The opposition MPs in the Lok Sabha voiced strong concerns regarding the Kumbh Mela stampede, accusing the government of negligence and insensitivity while calling for accountability. During a debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address, DMK MP Kanimozhi expressed her condolences to the victims, criticising the government's failure to ensure the safety of pilgrims.

Notably, the Opposition led noisy protests demanding a full discussion on the stampede, which claimed 30 lives during the chaos at Prayagraj on 29 January.

The protests escalated despite Speaker Om Birla's pleas for order, with members, including Gaurav Gogoi from Congress, disrupting the Question Hour to demand a complete list of the deceased

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

and accountability for the tragedy. Trinamool Congress MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar expressed dissatisfaction over the President's brief mention of the incident, condemning the government's broader handling of grievances including economic policies and issues in Manipur.

- As Parliament proceeded with 18 questions despite the uproar, the opposition reiterated its demands for governmental responsibility regarding the Kumbh Mela tragedy

As Parliament proceeded with 18 questions despite the uproar, the opposition reiterated its demands for governmental responsibility regarding the Kumbh Mela tragedy.

Centre tables Tribhuvan Sahkari University Bill

The government of India has introduced the Tribhuvan Sahkari University Bill in the Lok Sabha, aimed at addressing the inadequate training infrastructure in the co-operative sector.

Minister of State for Cooperation Krishan Pal outlined the necessity for a unified and standardised educational framework to meet the growing demand for qualified personnel. *—PTI*

14 held over hoax bomb threats: Govt

The Indian government has reported the arrest of thirteen individuals in 2024 related to hoax bomb threats aimed at airlines. Last year, airlines received a staggering 728 bomb threats, with 714 directed at domestic carriers. IndiGo faced the highest number of threats, totalling 216, followed by Air India and Vistara. *—PTI*

Rahul calls President's address a 'laundry list'

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Monday said the address of the President to the two Houses was similar to the one made last year, and claimed that it was the same "laundry list" of things the government has done.

Participating in a debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address on January 31, Gandhi said successive governments, be it the UPA or the present NDA, have not been able to tackle unemployment and give a clear-cut answer to youth about employment.

While talking of the Congress' vision of a president's address, Gandhi said we would not send our foreign minister to the United States to get our prime minister invited to the US President's 'coronation'.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar accused Rahul of resorting to "falsehood" after this statement.

Meanwhile, Rahul alleged that about 70 lakh voters, equivalent to Himachal Pradesh's population, were added to electoral rolls in Maharashtra in Lok Sabha and state elections. *—PTI*

BJP files privilege notice against Sonia over 'poor thing' remarks

A group of BJP MPs from the tribal community filed a breach of privilege notice on Monday against Congress parliamentary party leader Sonia Gandhi for using "derogatory and slanderous" words against President Droupadi Murmu. Led by BJP leader and former union minister Faggan Singh Kulaste, they met Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and sought disciplinary action against Gandhi, contending her remarks lowered the dignity of the office of the President. The notice was filed over Gandhi's remark on President Murmu after her address to a joint sitting of Parliament on Friday. "The poor lady, the President, was getting very tired by the end... she could hardly speak, poor thing," Sonia Gandhi was purportedly heard saying. *—PTI*

Jarange: Munde, accused Karad met me before polls

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 3 FEB

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Monday claimed Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde met him before the state polls last year along with his associate Walmik Karad, arrested later in an extortion case linked to the murder of a sarpanch. "I thought of not meeting them, but they were waiting outside." Jarange told reporters at a hospital where he is undergoing treatment after he ended his fast after five days of protest. Munde has been facing the heat since the arrest Karad in the extortion case related to the brutal murder of Massajog village sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh in Beed district in December 2024. Deshmukh was abducted, tortured and murdered on 9 December, 2024, for allegedly trying to stop an extortion bid targeting an energy firm in Beed district. *—PTI*

MAHA KUMBH

Saints warn against political misuse of Sanatan Dharma

MAHAKUMBH NAGAR, 3 FEB

Seers gathered at the Triveni Sangam for the 'Amrit Snan' on the occasion of Basant Panchami on Monday cautioned political leaders against misusing Sanatan Dharma and spreading rumours for political gain, and praised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over arrangements at the Maha Kumbh.

They also took a firm stand against those criticising the Maha Kumbh after 29 January stampede. The pre-dawn crush during the Amrit Snan on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya had resulted in death of 30 pilgrims and injuries 60 others.

According to a statement issued by the UP government on Monday, Mahant Santosh Das Sattua Baba Maharaj of Panch Nirvani Ani Akhara lashed out at political leaders, particularly Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying, "You have never followed or respected Sanatan Dharma. So, do not try to benefit from it now."

Akhara sadhus while taking a holy dip at the Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela, in Prayagraj **PHOTO: PTI**

Junapithadheeshwar Swami Avdheshanand Giri Maharaj stressed the spiritual unity witnessed at the Kumbh, saying, "We are witnessing India's unity here, with people of different thoughts and religions gathering on the banks of the Ganga." *—PTI*

JMM passes resolution against CAA, UCC, NRC

DUMKA, 3 FEB

The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) has passed a significant 50-point resolution during its 46th foundation day celebration in Dumka, strongly opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Uniform Civil Code (UCC), and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The resolution, emphasising the need for state-specific reforms, called for the complete rejection of these controversial national policies.

Addressing a large audience at Gandhi Maidan, Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressed discontent with the central government, claiming that Jharkhand, despite its rich mineral resources, remains one of the most backward states in India.

He accused the Centre of neglecting Jharkhand's needs and alleged that the recent Union budget favoured affluent sectors while ignoring issues affecting the poor. *—PTI*

Maharashtra village passes ballot paper voting resolution

PUNE, 3 FEB

A gram panchayat in Maharashtra's Sangli district has passed a resolution supporting the use of ballot papers instead of EVMs in future elections to "protect the Constitution," a gram sabha member has said.

Bahe village in Walva tehsil of Sangli district is perhaps the second village in western Maharashtra to pass a resolution discarding EVMs for ballot papers.

In December, the gram sabha of Kolewadi village in Karad (south) constituency in Satara district resolved to cast votes in future polls on ballot papers.

"The gram sabha in Bahe village passed a resolution recently supporting the use of ballot papers in all future elections instead of Electronic Voting Machines. We also appeal to other villages and their respective gram panchayats to pass similar resolutions to safeguard and protect the Constitution and democracy," said a Bahe gram sabha member.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The villagers submitted the resolution to the tehsildar, he said.

These resolutions were passed amid the doubts cast by Opposition leaders on the credibility of Electronic Voting Machines post the victory of BJP and allies in the Maharashtra assembly elections in November.

A section of villagers from Markadwadi in the Malshiras constituency in Solapur district attempted to conduct a mock poll on ballot papers raising doubt over EVMs, following the reduced victory margin of the NCP (SP) candidate. *—PTI*

Student found dead in Kerala hostel room

KOCHI, 3 FEB

A 21-year-old college student was found dead in her hostel room in Perumbavoor on Monday morning, police said. The deceased Aneeta Binoy, is a native of Parampuzha in Kottayam district. She was a final-year degree student at Rajagiri Viswajyothi College of Arts and Applied Sciences. According to the police, Aneeta was found hanging from the window panes at around 7 am. A note addressed to her parents was recovered from her room. Preliminary investigations suggest that it is a case of suspected suicide. Kuruppampady police have registered a case and initiated an investigation. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

22 flights disrupted by dense fog at Kolkata airport

KOLKATA, 3 FEB

Poor visibility caused by dense fog severely impacted flight operations at Kolkata's Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport on Monday, affecting 22 flights. Six incoming flights and 16 outgoing flights were delayed as visibility fell below the required threshold. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) implemented Low Visibility Procedures (LVP) from 1.21am to 8.45am, during which air traffic control guided aircraft using advanced navigation systems and ground lighting. Thankfully, 33 arriving flights and 44 departing aircraft successfully operated with the aid of the Instrument Landing System (ILS). Over the weekend, 13 additional flights were delayed due to similar conditions. The airport had previously experienced disruptions for three consecutive days from 23 January to 25 January, impacting a total of 159 flights. —*PTI*

Militant held in Imphal, weapons seized

IMPHAL, 3 FEB

A militant associated with the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) has been apprehended in Imphal West district, according to police reports. The insurgent, identified as 29-year-old Leihaothabam Nanao Sharma, was reportedly involved in extortion activities targeting government employees, shopkeepers, and local residents in the Greater Imphal area. He was arrested on Sunday at Lamphel supermarket. In a separate operation, security forces recovered an empty INSAS rifle magazine along with two cartridges from Matajang village and surrounding areas in Churachandpur district, officials confirmed. These actions underscore ongoing efforts to combat militancy and maintain public safety in the region. —*PTI*

Brothers demand half of father's body in last rites' dispute

TIKAMGARH, 3 FEB

A peculiar incident unfolded in the Lidhorataal village of Madhya Pradesh's Tikamgarh district, where a man controversially demanded half of his father's dead body amidst a dispute with his brother over the last rites. The drama ensued on Sunday following the death of Dhyani Singh Ghosh, 84, who succumbed to a prolonged illness while residing with his younger son, Deshraj. Upon learning of his father's passing, the elder son, Kishan, who arrived from another location, insisted on conducting the last rites. In a state of inebriation, Kishan proposed that the body be cut in half. Local villagers alerted the police, who intervened, persuading Kishan to leave. Subsequently, Deshraj was able to conduct the cremation as per his father's wishes. —*PTI*

SC seeks forensic report on Manipur CM's audio tapes

Apex court asks CFSL to submit findings in 6 weeks

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has ordered a sealed-cover forensic report regarding the authenticity of leaked audio recordings allegedly implicating Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh in the region's ethnic violence. The court characterised the situation as "limping back to normalcy" and instructed the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) to submit its findings in six weeks.

A bench led by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna sought the report following a plea from the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, who is calling for a court-monitored Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe into the chief minister's alleged involvement in the unrest.

Justice Sanjay Kumar, previously the Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court, expressed readiness to recuse himself if necessary but confirmed there were no issues from Bhushan's side.

The solicitor general, Tushar Mehta, concurred with the sentiments of the court but raised concerns about the ideological motivations behind Bhushan's claims. Bhushan countered this, stating that a truth lab had verified the recordings, attributing a 93 per cent probability to the chief minister's voice.

The Supreme Court had previously directed KOHUR to provide authenticity evidence for the audio clips, which allegedly reveal Singh inciting violence and facilitating arm looting.

More than 200 fatalities have been recorded, alongside widespread displacement, after clashes erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities last May.

Responding to media inquiries, Singh claimed a conspiracy was at play and that an FIR had been lodged, stressing that the matter is currently sub-judice. —*PTI*

Manipur CM Biren Singh at an event PHOTO: X

SC bans govts from reducing forest cover

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court of India has issued a stay order halting the Centre and state governments from undertaking any actions that could reduce forest areas. Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran were addressing petitions challenging amendments to the 2023 Forest Conservation Act, which critics argue could lead to significant deforestation. The Court affirmed, "We will not permit anything which leads to the reduction of forest area."

Concerns were raised regarding the 2023 amendments that reportedly excluded around 1.99 lakh square kilometres of forest land from legal protections. The Court said any proposals for establishing zoos or safaris on forest land will require approval from the Supreme Court. -PTI

SECURITY STRENGHTENED

Amrit Snan at Kumbh Mela sees millions days after stampede

PRAYAGRAJ, 3 FEB

Millions of devotees gathered at the Sangam for the third grand 'Amrit Snan' of the Maha Kumbh on Monday, coinciding with Basant Panchami. The bathing ritual proceeded smoothly, following a tragic stampede during the previous 'Amrit Snan' on Mauni Amavasya that claimed at least 30 lives.

The Uttar Pradesh government implemented stringent crowd management measures to prevent further incidents. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath monitored the situation from Lucknow, emphasising a "zero errors" approach.

DIG (Maha Kumbh) Vaibhav Krishna reported that additional forces were deployed at critical points to ensure safety.

By 10am, over 8.1 million devotees had bathed at the Sangam, with an expected footfall of around 50 million throughout the day.

The Amrit Snan began at 4am, following a schedule that allotted specific bathing windows for different Akharas.

The Sanyasi sect led the processions, completed by 8.30am, followed by the Bairagi and Udaseen sects later in the day.

Devotees expressed their experiences, with one participant stating, "I feel spiritual after coming here." —*PTI*

SC rejects Kumbh stampede PIL

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Supreme Court has declined to take up a PIL seeking specific safety guidelines for devotees at the Maha Kumbh Mela. The bench advised the petitioner to pursue the matter at Allahabad High Court, where the matter is already pending. The PIL requested guidelines to prevent similar incidents. —*PTI*

GRAP 3 revoked in Delhi as air gets better

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Centre's panel on Delhi-NCR's air quality on Monday revoked curbs under stage 3 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) amid a dip in pollution due to favourable meteorological conditions, according to an official order.

The average AQI in Delhi dropped below the 300 mark amid conditions favourable for the dispersion of pollutants, prompting the Commission for Air Quality Management to revoke curbs under Stage 3 of GRAP.

GRAP Stage 3 entails a ban on non-essential construction work. Classes up to grade V are required to shift to hybrid mode under Stage 3. Parents and students have the option to choose online education wherever available. Under Stage 3, the use of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars (four-wheelers) is restricted in Delhi and nearby NCR districts. Persons with disabilities are exempt.

Stage 3 also bans non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards in Delhi.

During winters, the Delhi-NCR region enforces restrictions under GRAP, which categorises air quality into four stages – Stage I (Poor, AQI 201-300), Stage II (Very Poor, AQI 301-400), Stage III (Severe, AQI 401-450), and Stage IV (Severe Plus, AQI above 450). —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Naxalite killed in an encounter in Chhattisgarh

KANKER, 3 FEB

A Naxalite was killed during an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district, police reported on Monday.

The gunfight erupted in a forest area along the borders of Kanker and Narayanpur districts on Sunday afternoon as part of an ongoing anti-Naxal operation.

This operation was conducted by a joint team from the District Reserve Guard and the Border Security Force, following intelligence regarding the presence of Maoist cadres from the North Bastar and Maad divisions in the region.

After the encounter, police recovered the body of the deceased Naxalite along with a firearm from the scene.

Further information is pending as security personnel have yet to return from the site.

This incident follows a significant engagement a day earlier in Bijapur district, where eight Naxalites were killed, bringing the total number of Naxal casualties in separate encounters across the state to 50 since January.

Notably, majority of the 34 incidents, occurred in the Bastar division. In January, 16 Naxalites were killed in Gariaband district, marking intensifying conflict.

Last year, security forces neutralized 219 Naxalites in Chhattisgarh. —*PTI*

Ayodhya: 3 held for rape, murder

AYODHYA, 3 FEB

Authorities have apprehended three individuals accused of allegedly raping and murdering a 22-year-old Dalit woman, whose body was discovered in a canal in Ayodhya on Saturday. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Raj Karan Nayar confirmed that the suspects—Hari Ram Kori, Vijay Sahu, and Digvijay Singh—were under the influence of alcohol when the alleged crime took place. The woman had been missing since Thursday, and her family has claimed she was the victim of rape and murder, citing horrific injuries, including gouged eyes and broken bones.

This tragic incident has ignited significant political backlash ahead of the Milkipur bypolls on 5 February, with opposition parties criticising the Yogi Adityanath government over its handling of law and order. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav specifically condemned the rising atrocities against the 'PDA' community—referring to the backward, Dalit, and minority groups.

In emotional remarks, Faizabad MP Awadhesh Prasad expressed his heartache upon meeting the devastated family, vowing to raise the issue in Parliament and threatening to resign if justice is not served.

Raj Karan Nayar PHOTO: ANI

In response, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath dismissed Prasad's emotions as "theatrics" and insinuated that Samajwadi Party criminals may have links to the incident. Prominent Congress leaders Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi also condemned the government for its perceived negligence, demanding accountability and justice. —*PTI*

Mumbai woman raped on train, porter held

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

A porter has been arrested after a woman alleged that she was raped in an unoccupied coach of a long-distance train at Bandra Terminus. The incident occurred late on Saturday night after the woman and her son arrived on an outstation train.

After alighting, the woman entered another train parked on the opposite side of the platform, which was empty, according to a Government Railway Police official. The porter, who was present in the coach, allegedly assaulted her before fleeing the scene. He has since been arrested and charged with rape under the BNS.

Authorities are investigating the woman's decision to enter the empty train. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Woman found injured in WB, rape alleged

KOLKATA, 3 FEB

A woman was discovered injured in an open field in Jangalia village, South 24 Parganas, leading to allegations of abduction and rape. The incident occurred on Sunday, and the woman was transferred to Baruipur Hospital, where her condition is reported as stable but serious.

According to family members, the woman had left home on Saturday night but failed to reach her destination. Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar expressed concerns over police inaction in tracing the perpetrators. Majumdar criticized Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her silence on the matter, questioning the government's commitment to women's safety. An investigation has been launched, with assurances the culprits will be apprehended. —*PTI*

HC gives bail to Unnao accused for surgery

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Delhi High Court has granted interim bail until 4 February to former BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar, who is currently serving a sentence for his conviction in the Unnao rape case, to undergo cataract surgery. A bench comprising Justices Yashwant Varma and Harish Vaidyanathan Shankar suspended Sengar's sentence as his surgery is scheduled for tomorrow at AIIMS.

The court ordered Sengar to surrender to prison authorities on 5 February, stating,

Sengar's legal counsel informed the court that the surgery could not be performed on the scheduled date due to unforeseen circumstances and requested a two-day extension for hospital admission.

The request for interim bail was opposed by the survivor's lawyer, who argued that Sengar should not be granted continuous bail. Sengar's plea to extend interim bail is part of his appeal against the December 2019 verdict, where he was convicted of kidnapping and raping a minor girl in 2017. The case was transferred to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh under the Supreme Court's directives in August 2019. —*PTI*

Kuldeep Singh Sengar PHOTO: PTI

INDIANS DISAPPOINTED

Zakir left out of Grammys' 'In Memoriam'

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Four-time Grammy winner and Indian tabla maestro Zakir Hussain was excluded from the 'In Memoriam' segment that was streamed live as part of the 67th Grammy Awards ceremony, leaving many Indian fans furious.

Hussain, however, found a mention on the 'In Memoriam' list on the official website of the Recording Academy, alongside ghazal maestro Pankaj Udhas, folk singer Sharda Sinha, and sarod player Aashish Khan.

The awards ceremony, organised by the Recording Academy, was held on Sunday at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles.

Every year, the Grammys pay tribute to industry legends who passed away in the year gone by in its 'In Memoriam' montage.

Hussain became the first musician from India to register three wins at last year's Grammys.

He died from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis in a San Francisco hospital on 15 December. He was 73.

During the live event, the Grammys honoured musicians such as Liam Payne, Kris Kristofferson, Cissy Houston, Tito Jackson, Joe Chambers, Jack Jones, Mary Martin, Marianne Faithfull, Seiji Ozawa, and Ella Jenkins.

Singer Chris Martin, fresh from the India leg of his band Coldplay's world tour 'Music of the Spheres', performed the 'In Memoriam tribute' with guitarist Grace Bowers on his song "All My Love".

A section of social media users were not happy and wrote posts tagging the Recording Academy on X about the omission.

"How come no mention of Zakir Hussain in Grammy obituary #Grammys2025 he was a winner last year (sic)" wrote one on X.

"Big miss. I didn't see @Recording Acad mention Zakir Hussain in the memoriam section. #GRAMMYs," said another.

"Shame not to see 4 time winner and multiple times nominee Zakir Hussain in the Grammy tribute to artists lost recently. Real shame. SVP @RecordingAcad," read another post. —*PTI*

Absconding Godhra train convict nabbed in Pune

PUNE, 3 FEB

A 55-year-old life convict connected to the 2002 Godhra train carnage has been apprehended in Pune, Maharashtra, after jumping parole. Salim Jarda, part of a group of 31 individuals sentenced to life for their roles in the tragedy, was arrested on 22 January alongside gang members involved in a series of thefts.

Jarda had been released on a seven-day parole from a Gujarat prison on 17 September, 2024, but subsequently absconded. Inspector Dinesh Tayde of the Alephata police station revealed that during investigations into thefts in rural Pune, Jarda's ties to the Godhra incident were uncovered.

According to police, Jarda and his associates would travel from Godhra to Pune to commit their crimes, with three theft cases linked to him so far. The Godhra train fire in 2002, resulted in the 59 deaths, intensifying communal tensions in the region. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- Jarda was arrested during investigations into thefts in pune when his connection with the case was revealed

1ST RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN WEDDING

In a historic first, Rashtrapati Bhavan will host a wedding on 12 February. President Droupadi Murmu approved the ceremony, impressed by CRPF officer Poonam Gupta's service. Gupta, posted as a PSO at Rashtrapati Bhavan, will marry Avneesh Kumar. The event will have a select, security-cleared guest list
PHOTO: PTI/X

Gaza aid surges amid ceasefire. Is it helping?

Two weeks after the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel took effect, aid is flooding into the Gaza Strip, bringing relief to a territory suffering from hunger, mass displacement and devastation following 15 months of war.

But Palestinians and aid workers say it's still an uphill battle to ensure the assistance reaches everyone. And looming large is the possibility that fighting will resume if the ceasefire breaks down after the six-week first phase.

As part of the ceasefire agreement, Israel said it would allow 600 aid trucks into Gaza each day, a major increase. Israel estimates that at least 4,200 trucks have entered each week since the ceasefire took hold.

Humanitarian groups say aid distribution is complicated by destroyed or damaged roads, Israeli inspections and threat of unexploded bombs.

On Saturday, Samir Abu Holi, 68, watched over a food-distribution point in Jabaliya, an area in northern Gaza razed to the ground during multiple Israeli offensives, the most recent of which cut off nearly all aid for over a month.

"I have more than 10 children. All of them need milk and food. Before the ceasefire, we used to provide food with difficulty," he said. "Today there is a little relief." Here's a closer look at the aid situation.

Humanitarian groups say aid distribution is complicated by destroyed or damaged roads, Israeli inspections and threat of bombs ***PHOTO: PTI***

A surge of aid

The main UN food agency, the World Food Programme, said it dispersed more food to Palestinians in Gaza during the first four days of the ceasefire than it did, on average, during any month of the war. Over 32,000 metric tonnes of aid have entered Gaza since the ceasefire, the agency said last week.

Aid is now entering through two crossings in the north and one in the south. Aid agencies said they are opening bakeries and handing out high-energy biscuits, and Hamas police have returned to the streets to help restore order.

Before the ceasefire, aid organisations said delivery was complicated by armed gangs looting the trucks, attacks on aid workers, arduous Israeli inspections and difficulties coordinating with COGAT, the Israeli military body charged with facilitating aid. Israel blamed the UN and humanitarian organisations for failing to deliver aid once it reached Gaza.

There's now the "political will to make everything else work," said Tania Hary, executive director of Gisha, an Israeli organisation dedicated to protecting Palestinians' right to move freely within Gaza.

Food prices are still a challenge

Nadine Jomaa, a young woman in Bureij in central Gaza, said the aid is not freely available, and she needs to buy goods in the market, where they are resold for inflated prices. Though prices are coming down, flour and cooking gas still cost roughly triple the amount they did before the war, according to the World Food Programme.

Her family is eating only cheap canned goods. "We need more food, water, household items for the kitchen and bathroom and women's items," she said.

Although humanitarian officials have long said the best way to prevent extortion is to flood Gaza with aid, Palestinians in the north say that, so far, the influx appears to have only boosted shadowy middlemen. Residents complain that there are not nearly enough tents entering Gaza while non-essential items such as chocolate, nuts and soda are suddenly ubiquitous.

Ahmed Qamar, 34, who returned to live in the ruins of his former home in Jabaliya, said his area has seen just a few dozen aid trucks.

"Hundreds of families here are sleeping in the open and in the cold," he said. "We need electricity and shelter, and meanwhile markets are flooded with chocolate and cigarettes."

Though aid workers say the Israeli inspection process has accelerated, getting certain types of aid into Gaza is still challenging. Some items are deemed "dual-use," barring them from Gaza because of concerns they could be diverted by militants for military purposes.

Some hospitals and desalination plants still have fuel shortages. And Hamas on Sunday accused Israeli officials of obstructing the delivery of medical supplies and reconstruction machinery.

According to a list circulated to humanitarian groups by COGAT and shared with The Associated Press, desalination and water-collection devices, storage units, tools, tent kits, ovens, water-resistant clothing and equipment for shelter construction teams all require "pre-approval" before entering Gaza. Large tents, sleeping bags, portable toilets, heating pads and vaccines are cleared to enter strip without Israeli approval.

COGAT acknowledged keeping certain items on the dual-use list but said it is still permitting them into Gaza after screening. The agency said tents are not considered dual-use, and Israel has allowed tens of thousands into Gaza in recent weeks "without restriction." It also said Israel has extended the hours crossings are open and allowed road repairs inside Gaza.

Destroyed roads, unexploded ordnance

Roads have been heavily damaged by the war, and unexploded bombs litter the landscape. The UN estimates that 5 per cent to 10 per cent of all ammunition dropped in Gaza has failed to detonate, making the territory potentially perilous. .

UNMAS, the UN agency handling unexploded ordnance, said that since the ceasefire took hold, humanitarian convoys and civilians have reported finding large aircraft bombs, mortars and rifle grenades.

As they return home, many Palestinians are living in areas where the water network has been destroyed. That makes dehydration and the spread of disease due to poor sanitary conditions and limited medical care a threat.

Speaking from southern Gaza, Jonathan Crickx, chief of communications at UNICEF, recalled being on a road where "thousands and thousands of children and families were walking."—*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

ASER flags growing gender gap in digital learning

MANSOOR ALI KHAN

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024 by Pratham presents a striking gender disparity in smartphone access and usage among children in rural India. Despite technological advancements and the increasing penetration of digital devices, the report highlights that boys continue to outpace girls in access, ownership, and utilisation of smartphones. This is especially troubling, as digital connectivity and access can be closely linked to fostering agency and empowerment.

In an era where smartphones can help you access information and education at your fingertips, this disparity places girls at a significant disadvantage, exacerbating existing inequalities. If not addressed, this could prevent many girls from gaining the full benefits of the digital revolution, which is shaping economies and societies.

The numbers tell a story

The ASER 2024 survey, conducted across 29 states and Union Territories, provides a comprehensive snapshot of children's schooling and learning experiences in rural India. On digital literacy, the findings reveal that 90.2 per cent of boys and 88.1 per cent of girls in the 14 to 16-year age group have smartphones available at home. This relatively narrow gap seems to be wider when one examines the actual usage of smartphones.

For digital tasks, 70.2 per cent of boys were able to bring a device, compared to only 62.2 per cent of girls. This indicates that even when smartphones are available at home, girls face systemic barriers—be it social norms, parental control, or prioritisation of boys' education—that limit their access.

Moreover, 85.5 per cent of boys reported that they could use smartphones, while the figure for girls stood at 79.4 per cent. Among those who could use a smartphone, the disparity in ownership is even starker: Only 36.2 per cent of boys and a mere 26.9 per cent of girls had their own smartphones.

Regional disparities

The digital divide varies widely across regions in the country, with some areas being far more connected than others. When it comes to using smartphones for education-related activities, the survey found that students in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Sikkim performed notably better, with a higher percentage of students using the smartphone to perform at least one education-related activity during the reference week.

This can be attributed to stronger digital infrastructure, greater awareness, and strong efforts to incorporate technology into learning.

In contrast, states like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal lagged, reporting the lowest percentages of students engaging in educational activities via smartphones. This regional variation highlights the need for tailored interventions that address differences in digital literacy, infrastructure, as well as socio-cultural factors. Tailored, region-specific solutions are essential for bridging the digital divide.

Empowering girls through equal digital access

The gender gap in digital access is not just a statistic; it is a reflection of deep-rooted societal norms that prioritise boys' education and opportunities over girls'. Smartphones and digital devices should not be seen merely as tools for communication. They provide access to online learning, digital libraries and skill-building programs, and can also accelerate opportunities for social mobility. For girls, particularly in rural areas, these devices can open doors to a world beyond their immediate surroundings.

However, the lack of access and ownership deprives girls of the ability to fully participate in the digital age. It restricts their exposure to knowledge, limits their ability to develop digital skills, and eventually reduces their competitiveness in an increasingly technology-driven job market.

The consequences of this divide are far-reaching, perpetuating cycles of inequality and stalling progress toward gender equity.

As an educationist, I believe that addressing the gender gap in digital access is not just about technology—it is about equity and empowerment.

Smartphones and digital tools hold immense potential to bridge educational disparities, but only if we ensure that no child—especially no girl—is left behind.

It is time for us, as a society, to recognise that empowering girls with digital access is not a choice. It is a necessity.

The future of education, and indeed the nation, depends on it.

—*Salar News*

(The writer is General Secretary, Management of Independent CBSE Schools Association, Karnataka)

The ASER 2024 survey, conducted across 29 states and Union Territories, provides a comprehensive snapshot of children's schooling and learning experiences in rural India ***PHOTO: UNICEF***

Rise in cancer cases in South East Asia, WHO calls for joint efforts

The South-East Asia Region reported the highest number of cancers of lips and oral cavity, uterine cervix, and childhood cancers among all World Health Organisation regions in 2022, regional director of the WHO SEAR Saima Wazed said on Monday.

She said it is estimated that by 2050, there will be 85 per cent increase in the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the region.

Wazed, who is the regional director of World Health Organisation South East Asian Region (WHO-SEAR) called for joint efforts led by governments, supported by WHO and partners, and through collaboration that will make the region better equipped to tackle the rising cancer burden.

Ahead of World Cancer Day on February 4, she said, "On this year's World Cancer Day themed 'United by Unique', which is a reminder of the collective commitment against cancer, WHO acknowledges every patient's unique experiences and the value of people-centred care delivered jointly by healthcare providers, families, friends and community".

The WHO South-East Asia Region reported 2.4 million new cases of cancer in 2022, including 56,000 children, and 1.5 million deaths.

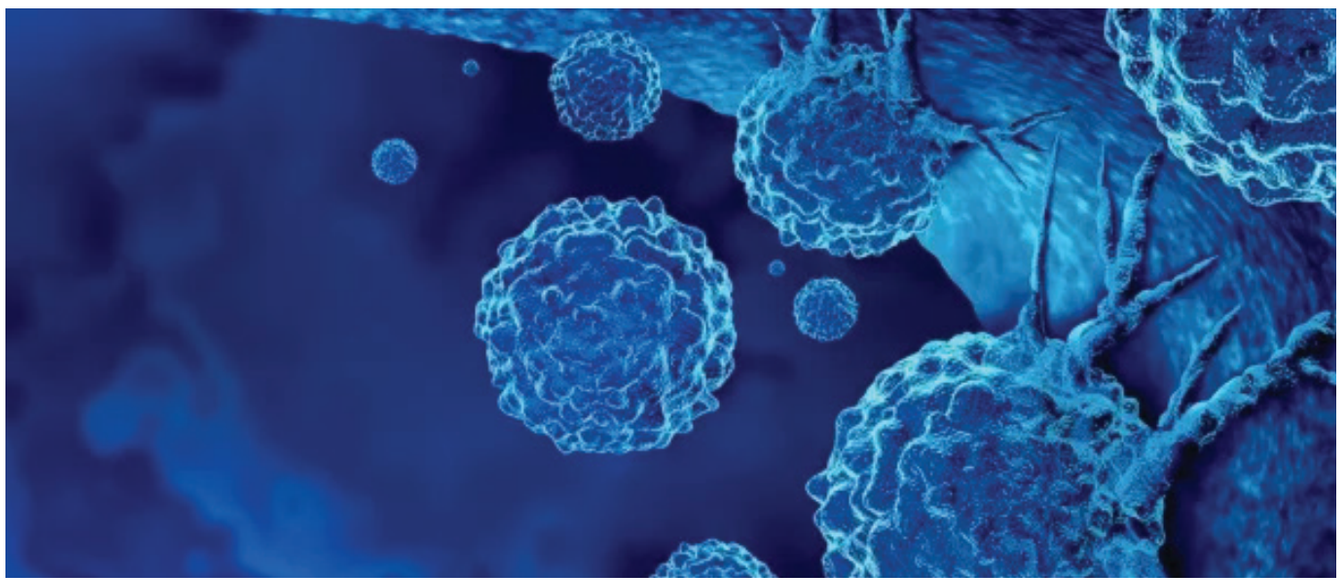
"Among all the WHO regions, our region had the highest number of cancers of lips and oral cavity, uterine cervix, and childhood cancers. It is estimated that by 2050, there will be 85 per cent increase in the number of new cases and deaths in the region," Wazed stated.

In the last few years, she said the countries in the region have made notable progress in cancer control. Six countries have dedicated national plans for cancer control, and two countries have included cancer as part of national NCD plan to strategically guide cancer prevention and control activities.

Bhutan successfully completed the Health Flagship project in 2020, where more than 90 per cent of the target populations were screened for gastric, cervical, and breast cancer each, with screened positives being linked to diagnosis and treatment.

The country is currently integrating the model into mainstream health services. Through the 'Cancer Anywhere' program, Thailand has adopted universal health coverage approach to cancer management.

Eight countries have introduced nationwide Human Papillomavirus vaccination. Global initiative for childhood cancer is being implemented in ten countries through a regional network of institutions, she said.



It is estimated that by 2050, there will be 85 per cent increase in the number of new cancer cases and deaths in the region ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Seven countries have operational population-based cancer registries. In ten countries, tertiary level cancer care is generally available, reaching 50 percent or more patients in need, she said.

The region has seen the fastest rate of decline in tobacco use which is a major risk factor for several high burden cancers. WHO has worked closely with all the member states supporting these efforts.

"There are, however, persistent challenges," Wazed said pointing out that the response to cancer control is not uniform among countries.

"National cancer control programmes and plans are not fully aligned with evidence or best practices resulting in their ineffective implementation. Policies and guidance on control of cancer-causing agents prevalent in the region, such as areca nut, is lacking," she said.

Existing cancer prevention policies and programmes are not fully implemented, leading to millions of avoidable cases. Cancer services are included in health benefit packages in only six countries, Wazed stated.

"Screening for specific cancers is low. For example, cervical cancer screening has less than 50 percent coverage in seven countries, which is much below the target of 70 percent required for elimination of cervical cancer as a public health problem," she said.

"Late diagnosis, when treatment is generally less effective and costlier, is common. National capacities remain inadequate to manage the increasing cancer burden," she said.

Only three percent of patients in need of palliative care are estimated to be receiving the care, she said.

To overcome challenges through a contextualised, evidence-based approach, WHO worked with member states and partners in co-creating the WHO South-East Asia regional strategy for comprehensive cancer prevention and management 2024-2030, implementation of which was approved at the 77th Regional Committee, Wazed said.

The strategy highlights the importance of a people-centred approach, placing individuals and communities at the heart of health systems, including cancer care.

"Additionally, partnership will be strengthened with communities, civil societies, private sector and other stakeholders. It is only with joint effort led by governments, supported by WHO and partners, and through collaboration that we will be better equipped to tackle the rising cancer burden," she said. —*PTI*

Blast in Moscow kills 1, leaves 4 others wounded

MOSCOW, 3 FEB

A blast in an upscale residential block in Moscow killed one person and wounded four others on Monday morning, Russian news agencies reported, citing emergency officials. Those wounded in the blast, the cause of which was not revealed, were hospitalised in grave condition, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing Moscow health officials. The authorities said that a criminal case has been filed in connection with the explosion, however, they did not say on what charges. Footage released by Russia's main investigative agency, the Investigative Committee, showed a building hall with glass doors shattered and suspended ceilings torn up. *—PTI*

Hezbollah to hold funeral of slain leader on 23 Feb

JERUSALEM, 3 FEB

Hezbollah has announced that the funeral of its former chief Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, killed in Beirut in an Israeli airstrike in last September, will be held on 23 February, reported The Times of Israel. Current Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem announced the funeral date in a televised speech, the report said. "After security conditions prevented holding a funeral" during two months of all-out war that ended with a ceasefire deal reached on November 27, Hezbollah has decided to hold "on February 23 a grand... public funeral," he said. "We hope that it will be a grand funeral procession befitting this great personality," Qassem added. In a video message in October last year, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared the death of Nasrallah. *—PTI*

Earthquake fear spreads alarm on Greek island

SANTORINI, 3 FEB

Schools were closed and emergency crews deployed on the volcanic Greek island of Santorini on Monday after a spike in seismic activity raised concerns about a potentially powerful earthquake. Precautions were also ordered on several nearby Aegean Sea islands – all popular summer vacation destinations – after more than 200 undersea earthquakes were recorded in three days. "These measures are precautionary," Civil Protection Minister Vasilis Kikilias said on Sunday after an emergency meeting in Athens. "We urge citizens to strictly adhere to safety recommendations to minimise risk." Experts said the quakes, measuring up to magnitude 4.7, are not linked to Santorini's volcano, but acknowledged that the pattern of seismic activity is a cause for concern. *—PTI*

Trump threatens to widen tariff war scope to EU, UK

Says EU has taken advantage, leaving $300B deficit

WASHINGTON, 3 FEB

US President Donald Trump has threatened to widen the scope of his trade tariffs, repeating his warning that the European Union (EU) – and potentially the UK – will face levies, even as he conceded that Americans could bear some of the economic brunt of a nascent global trade war, The Guardian reported on Monday.

Trump also said he will cut all funding to South Africa and has launched an investigation into the country's policies, claiming a "massive" human rights violation is happening over a new land expropriation law. "It will definitely happen with the European Union, I can tell you that," he said. "I wouldn't say there's a timeline but it's going to be pretty soon."

Trump appeared to take a softer line on the UK, citing a good relationship with the Prime Minister Keir Starmer, while saying tariffs still "might happen".

"The UK is out of line but I'm sure that one, I think that one can be worked out... "Well, Prime Minister Starmer's been very nice, we've had a couple of meetings, we've had numerous phone calls, we're getting along very well, we'll see whether or not we can balance out our budget," he said.

The US President was more decisive about the EU. "They've really taken advantage of us and we are at over a $300B deficit," he said.

The EU has responded, saying that it will "respond firmly" if Trump enacts tariffs that could affect its member countries. *—PTI*

Trump also intends to cut all funding to South Africa and has launched an investigation into the country's polices *PHOTO: X*

EU LEADERS MEET TO DISCUSS DEFENCE SPENDING

BRUSSELS, 3 FEB

European Union leaders are gathering on Monday for informal talks focused on defence with no clear sign yet from US President Donald Trump about how he intends to try to end Russia's war on Ukraine.

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte will join the bloc's 27 leaders at a self-styled "retreat" at Egmont Place in the Belgian capital, Brussels. The summit will focus on EU–US cooperation, military spending and ramping up Europe's defense industry.

The meeting comes as Europe's biggest land conflict since World War II approaches its third anniversary and Trump threatening allies with tariffs. *—PTI*

Trump agreed on USAID shut down, says Musk

WASHINGTON, 3 FEB

The US Agency for International Development is on the cusp of being shuttered, according the Trump administration's billionaire adviser and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who has been wrestling for control of the agency in recent days.

On Monday, Musk held a live session on X Spaces, previously known as Twitter Spaces, and said that he spoke in detail about USAID with the president. "He agreed we should shut it down," Musk said. "It became apparent that it's not an apple with a worm it in," he said. *—PTI*

WHO Chief asks world leaders to urge US to stay

GENEVA, 3 FEB

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has asked global leaders to lean on Washington to reverse President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the UN health agency, insisting in a closed-door meeting with diplomats last week that the US will miss out on critical information about global disease outbreaks.

Meanwhile, countries also pressed the WHO at a key budget meeting last Wednesday about how it might cope with the exit of its biggest donor, reports said. *—PTI*

REIGN OF TERROR

Dawn reported on Monday that in January, at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities *PHOTO: X*

Pak witnessed 42% more terror strikes in Jan than in Dec

ISLAMABAD, 3 FEB

Pakistan witnessed a sharp increase in terror attacks in January 2025, surging by 42 per cent compared to the previous month, a think tank monitoring the scenario has said.

Quoting the data released by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), Dawn reported on Monday that in January, at least 74 militant attacks were recorded nationwide, resulting in 91 fatalities, including 35 security personnel, 20 civilians and 36 militants.

Another 117 individuals suffered injuries, including 53 security forces personnel, 54 civilians and 10 militants.

The report highlighted an intensified counterterrorism campaign by security forces, which led to elimination of at least 185 militants in January, making it the second deadliest month for militant casualties since 2016.

The highest number of militants killed in a single month since 2016 was recorded in December, when security forces neutralised 190 militants.

The combined toll of militant attacks and security operations in January stood at 245 fatalities, comprising 185 militants, 40 security forces personnel and 20 civilians.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) remained the worst-affected province, followed by Balo¬chistan. In KP's settled districts, insurgents carried out 27 attacks, resulting in 19 fatalities, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and two militants.

The tribal districts of KP (erstwhile Fata) witnessed 19 attacks, leading to 46 deaths, including 13 security personnel, eight civilians, and 25 militants. Balochistan also experienced a surge in militant activity, with at least 24 attacks, which claimed 26 lives, including 11 security personnel, six civilians, and nine militants.

In Punjab, two militant attacks were reported, leaving one security official injured. On 31 January, militants launched a major assault on a police check post in DG Khan's Jhangi area, but security forces repelled the attack without any casualties. *—PTI*

The dead included 18 women and one man *PHOTO: X*

19 killed in Syria as car bomb explodes

DAMASCUS, 3 FEB

A car bomb exploded on the outskirts of a northern Syrian city on Monday, killing at least 19 people and leaving more than a dozen wounded, hospital workers said.

The car detonated next to a vehicle carrying mostly female agricultural workers on the outskirts of the city of Manbij.

The dead included 18 women and one man, a nurse at the hospital, Mohammad Ahmad, said. Another 15 women were wounded, some of them in critical condition, according to the local Syrian civil defence.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion.

It was the seventh car bomb explosion in Manbij in just over a month, said Munir Mustafa, the deputy director of civil defence.

Turkish-backed factions, known as the Syrian National Army, have clashed with the US-backed Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces. The factions took the city from the SDF in early December during a lightning insurgency that toppled President Bashar Assad. *—PTI*

MAN WHO WANTED TO SPLIT BELGIUM BECOMES ITS PM

BRUSSELS, 3 FEB

Belgium has a new prime minister whose political purpose was long to break up the nation, gut the state structures and give ever more autonomy to his northern Flanders at the cost of everyone else.

Bart De Wever took the oath early Monday, looking straight at King Philippe, the latest monarch of a royal house he so long had little but disdain for because it symbolised the old concept of Belgian unity. "I swear allegiance to the king," he said.

The prime minister and leading ministers took the oath in Dutch and French while several others on the 15-member team from both sides of the linguistic divide stuck to their own language during a short ceremony at the Royal Palace.

De Wever of the Flemish nationalist N-VA party succeeds Alexander De Croo, who has remained in office as a caretaker since the June elections last year. *—PTI*

Congo hospitals crowded with wounded, exhausting supplies

GOMA, 3 FEB

Hospitals in Goma, eastern Congo, are overwhelmed as fighting between government forces and Rwanda-backed M23 rebels intensifies. Since the rebels launched an offensive on 26 January, over 700 people have died and nearly 3,000 have been injured. Bethesda Hospital, which has a 250-bed capacity, receives more than 100 new patients daily, forcing many to share beds or lie on the floor in pain. Medical staff fear the spread of infections due to overcrowding and limited resources.

The conflict has displaced millions in the region, with many seeking refuge in Goma, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. Medical facilities, including Kyeshero Hospital, face severe shortages in supplies and staff. The local airport, now under rebel control, has halted medical shipments, as aid stocks have been looted.

Congo's government reports 773 deaths and 2,880 injuries, though the true toll is feared to be higher, with concerns over mass graves. Hospitals are struggling to manage both the injured and the dead. Maternité de la Charité Hospital in Goma is storing bodies in tents to prevent decomposition, as morgues overflow.

Fears of disease outbreaks, including cholera and measles, are growing as displaced populations crowd into camps. The World Health Organisation warns of widespread health risks, but access to affected areas remains limited. The region continues to face one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. *—PTI*

Hundreds of wounded people have poured into hospitals in Goma after the M23 rebels captured a major city in eastern Congo *PHOTO: X*

SPARKLES IN THE SHADOWS

Grammy magic: Music's biggest night shines with stars

The 67th Grammy Awards, hosted by Trevor Noah, featured a red carpet of black tones amid the Los Angeles wildfires' devastation. Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar won big, the Weeknd ended his boycott and Sabrina Carpenter dazzled with 'Espresso'. Key winners include...

BEST DANCE/ELECTRONIC ALBUM
'Brat', Charli XCX

BEST DANCE/POP RECORDING
'Von Dutch', Charli XCX

BEST DANCE/ELECTRONIC RECORDING
'Neverender', Justice and Tame Impala

Best Latin pop album
'Las Mujeres Ya No Llora', Shakira

BEST ROCK PERFORMANCE
'Now and Then', The Beatles

BEST POP SOLO PERFORMANCE
'Espresso', Sabrina Carpenter

BEST POP DUO/GROUP PERFORMANCE
'Die With A Smile', Lady Gaga & Bruno Mars

BEST ROCK SONG
'Broken Man', St Vincent

BEST ROCK ALBUM
'Hackney Diamonds', The Rolling Stones

BEST RAP ALBUM
'Alligator Bites Never Heal', Doechii

BEST SCORE SOUNDTRACK FOR VISUAL MEDIA
'Dune: Part Two', Hans Zimmer

BEST AUDIO BOOK NARRATION
'Last Sunday in Plains: A Centennial Celebration', Jimmy Carter

Kanye gets kicked out off Grammys?

Rapper Kanye West returned to the Grammys on Sunday. While walking the carpet, his wife, Bianca Censori, removed her fur coat to reveal a see-through slip that left her completely nude for cameras. Meanwhile, Kanye was clad in black and black sunglasses. Following the red-carpet appearance, West and Censori were nowhere to be seen inside the venue. A report circulated online that the pair had been kicked out of the event and were not officially invited to attend.

Indian-American vocalist and entrepreneur Chandrika Tandon won the Grammy award for the album 'Triveni' in the Best New Age, Ambient or Chant Album category

Chris' tribute to Liam Payne leaves all teary eyed

A heartfelt tribute was paid to Liam Payne, former One Direction star, who died om 31 October. The "In Memoriam" segment featured a montage of his journey with the band, showcasing their rise to global superstardom. Payne's voice echoed as he reflected on their success, saying, "We never expected any of this to happen." Coldplay's Chris Martin performed 'All My Love', leaving fans deeply moved and sharing emotional tributes on social media.

Gold jumps ₹400 to breach ₹85,000-mark

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Gold prices jumped Rs 400 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 85,300 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday on the back of continued demand by jewellers and stockists, said the All India Sarafa Association. Traders said sharp depreciation in rupee and firm trends in the international markets lifted gold rates. Gold of 99.9 per cent purity had settled at Rs 84,900 per 10 grams on Saturday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity rose for the fourth straight session by climbing Rs 400 to hit another record high of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams. The yellow metal ended at Rs 84,500 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Rallying for the fifth consecutive session, silver increased Rs 300 to Rs 96,000 per kg on Monday. The white metal finished at Rs 95,700 per kg in the previous market close. —*PTI*

PHOTO:PTI

Jewar airport to start regular ops from April: Minister

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Jewar international airport is emerging as the largest airport in Asia and regular operations will start from April, Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu said in Rajya Sabha. Responding to supplementaries during Question in the Rajya Sabha, he said the airlines are also excited to start operations from there and improve connectivity across the world. "Jewar airport is emerging as the country's and Asia's biggest airport. We have conducted the validation flight in December at the airport. "Everything is going according to timelines and very soon in the month of April we will see regular operations starting from Jewar-Noida international airport," the minister told the Upper House. He said all airlines including Air India and Indigo are very excited to improve connectivity from the Noida airport. —*PTI*

Airtel's Gopal Vittal named as acting chair of GSMA

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman and MD of telecom firm Bharti Airtel and Deputy Chair GSMA, has been appointed as the acting chair of the GSMA board, a release said on Monday. The appointment came following the resignation of José Maria Álvares-Pallete, Chairman and CEO of Telefónica, from the company. By virtue of the resignation, he was no longer able to continue in the position of the Chair of the GSMA. Airtel, in a release, announced that Vittal has been appointed as acting chair of the GSMA Board. GSMA represents the global telecom industry with over 1,100 companies from the ecosystem across the world. —*PTI*

Veteran banker Victor Menezes passes away at 77

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

Veteran banker Victor Menezes, one of the earliest India-origin CXOs to lead storeyed multinationals, has died in the US at the age of 77, sources said on Monday. The Pune-born Menezes, an alumnus of IIT-Bombay and MIT, had a 32-year-long association with Citibank and retired as the global banking major's senior vice chairman. Menezes died in Miami, sources said. However, the exact reasons for his death were not immediately known. Menezes, the son of a civil servant Manuel Menezes and brother of former Diageo chief executive officer Ivan Menezes, was actively involved in various philanthropic initiatives. Menezes is survived by wife Tara, a former beauty queen, and four children. —*PTI*

US tariffs: Trade war fears push rupee down 87 mark

Indian currency loses 55 paise to close at record low

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

The rupee plunged 55 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.17 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as global market sentiments were impacted after the Trump administration slapped tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee touched a fresh all-time low on a surge in the US Dollar index and weak global markets after Trump Tariffs on Canada Mexico, and China triggered fears of a broad trade war.

Donald Trump slapped Canada and Mexico with 25 per cent duties and China with a 10 per cent duty.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 87.00 and touched an intraday low of 87.29 against the American currency during the session.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

RBI taking corrective measures

Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Monday said there is no concern over the rupee value, and the Reserve Bank of India is managing the volatility of the local currency

The local unit finally settled at a record closing low of 87.17 (provisional), lower by 55 paise over its previous close.

On Friday, the rupee settled flat at 86.62 against the American currency.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves increased USD 5.574 billion to USD 629.557 billion in the week ended January 24, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Monday said there is no concern over the rupee value, and the Reserve Bank of India is managing the volatility of the local currency. "There is no concern about the value of the rupee. The volatility in the rupee is being managed by the RBI," Pandey told reporters.

He said the rupee is a "free float" and no control or fixed rate is applicable to the currency. —*PTI*

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 319.22 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,186.74, snapping its five-day rally PHOTO: PTI

Investors rendered ₹4.29L cr poorer as markets lose steam

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

PHOTO: AP

The combined market valua- Investors' wealth diminished by Rs 4.29 lakh crore on Monday after the markets declined amid concerns over US President Donald Trump imposing tariffs on some of its trading partners.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by Rs 4,29,823.69 crore to Rs 4,19,54,829.60 crore, tracking weak trends in equities.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 319.22 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,186.74, snapping its five-day rally. Intra-day, it tumbled 749.87 points or 0.96 per cent to 76,756.09. The NSE Nifty declined 121.10 points or 0.52 per cent to 23,361.05.

"Nifty declined due to weak global cues as Donald Trump's imposition of tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China escalated trade war concerns," Siddhartha Khemka of Motilal Oswal Financial Services said.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Motors, Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, ITC, Power Grid, NTPC and Reliance Industries were the major laggards.

Among the gainers, Bajaj Finance jumped over five per cent. Mahindra & Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel and Maruti also ended higher.

The BSE smallcap gauge tanked 1.77 per cent and midcap index declined 0.89 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, capital goods tanked 4.29 per cent, industrials 3.79 per cent, power 3.30 per cent, utilities 2.71 per cent, oil & gas 2.52 per cent and metal 1.99 per cent. — *PTI*

GLOBAL SHARES SLIP AS TARIFF WORRIES GROW

TOKYO, 3 FEB

Global shares mostly fell in Monday trading as worries grow about US President Donald Trump imposing tariffs on key US trading partners.

France's CAC 40 slipped 1.6 per cent in early trading to 7,826.14, while Germany's DAX dropped 1.5 per cent to 21,395.31. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 1.3 per cent to 8,565.00. US shares were set to drift lower with Dow futures down 1.2 per cent at 44,152.00. S&P 500 futures slipped 1.5 per cent to 5,977.25.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 lost 2.7 per cent to finish at 38,520.09. Australia's SP/ASX 200 declined 1.8 per cent to 8,379.40. South Korea's Kospi dropped 2.5 per cent to 2,453.95. Hong Kong's Hang Seng dipped less than 0.1 per cent to 20,217.26, while trading was closed in Shanghai for a holiday.

Analysts said Asian markets were bracing for volatility set off by a possible trade war escalation. —*PTI*

India, UK to resume free trade talks from 24 Feb

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Negotiations for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between India and the UK are set to recommence on February 24, according to official sources. A visit from the UK trade minister to New Delhi is expected shortly.

The discussions for the FTA, which began in January 2022, were put on hold with the onset of both nations' general election cycles after the 14th round of talks. The agreement seeks to enhance bilateral trade and investment.

Key objectives include the elimination or significant reduction of customs duties on a wide array of goods exchanged between the two countries, as well as the easing of trade regulations for services and investments. The Indian business sector is advocating for improved access to the UK market for skilled professionals in IT and healthcare, alongside zero customs duties on multiple goods.

PHOTO: X

Following recent proposals by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to increase foreign investment in the insurance sector from 74 per cent to 100 per cent, the negotiations may gain momentum. The ongoing discussions also encompass a bilateral investment treaty (BIT) and cover 26 chapters, including those focused on goods, services, investments, and intellectual property rights. —*PTI*

CENTRE PLANS HEALTH COVER FOR GIG WORKERS

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

The Finance Ministry and the Labour Department are jointly developing a scheme to extend healthcare benefits under the PM Jan Arogya Yojana to around one crore gig workers, said Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil.

In her recent Budget address, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman revealed plans for the identity registration of gig workers on the e-Shram portal, paving the way for access to these healthcare services. Govil noted that the specific parameters and details of the initiative are currently being finalised in consultation with the Ministry of Labour and other relevant ministries.

The social security scheme for gig workers may be structured as either a fully Central Sector initiative or a centrally sponsored programme, with costs potentially shared between the Centre and states on a 60:40 basis. —*PTI*

India cuts customs duty to match ASEAN: CBIC

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

India has made significant strides in reducing its average customs duty rate, lowering it from 11.65 per cent to 10.66 per cent . This reduction positions India closer to the customs duty levels prevalent in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries, as stated by Sanjay Kumar Agarwal, Chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

Agarwal described the customs duty rationalisation as part of the government's effort to simplify the tariff structure, enhance the competitiveness of Indian industries and streamline the tax regime. He highlighted that the high-duty brackets (25 per cent to 150 per cent) apply to only a limited number of products, while most items fall within a range of 0 per cent to 10 per cent.

Sanjay Kumar Agarwal PHOTO: X

This step is also aimed at countering the narrative from developed nations, particularly the United States, which has branded India as a "tariff king". The recent Budget for 2025-26 included the removal of seven tariff rates, building on another seven removed in the 2023-24 budget. Following these changes, only eight tariff rates will remain, including a zero rate.

Furthermore, the government has focused on maintaining the supply of critical minerals essential for sectors such as semiconductors and clean energy. Notably, duties on waste and scrap of these minerals have been reduced to nil to encourage recycling within the country. This strategy is part of a broader move to raise India's integration into global supply chains "and support local manufacturing. —*PTI*

INDIA'S DEBT REDUCTION OPENS RISKS, SAYS FITCH

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Fitch Ratings has indicated that India's debt reduction trajectory is progressing slowly, posing potential risks to its sovereign rating in light of any significant economic downturn. Jeremy Zook, Director and Primary Sovereign Analyst for India at Fitch, commented on the central government's commitment to its medium-term fiscal framework, which aims to reduce debt in a sustainable manner.

Despite affirming India's sovereign rating at 'BBB-' with a stable outlook in August 2024 – unchanged since August 2006 – Fitch expressed concerns about potential downside risks if India were to face a major economic shock.

The government projected a fiscal deficit of 4.8 per cent of GDP for FY25 and 4.4 per cent for FY26, aligning with Fitch's expectations. —*PTI*

White-collar hiring up 4% in Jan

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

White-collar hiring activities in January witnessed a four per cent growth driven by traditional sectors, including FMCG, pharma and insurance, according to a report released on Monday.

"In 2024, January had greeted us with a disappointing 11 per cent de-growth in hiring. In contrast, 2025 seems to have started on a positive note. The 4 per cent hiring growth is tempered as IT recovery settles in, however, strong growth in most core sectors, including FMCG, pharma, insurance and hospitality is a good sign and augurs well for a cracking 2025 in terms of white collar hiring," Naukri Chief Business Officer Pawan Goyal said in a statement quoting NaukriJobSpeak Index.

The report revealed a steady hiring environment with strong performances in core sectors like FMCG (16 per cent), insurance (15 per cent), and pharma (11 per cent), and hospitality by 8 per cent, while IT hiring remained flattish, the report added. —*PTI*

VW India moves Bombay HC over $1.4B tax notice

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Skoda Auto Volkswagen India has filed a case against tax authorities over the Rs 11,000 crore (about USD 1.4B) show cause notice for alleged customs duty fraud related to the import of cars as completely knocked down units. The company has approached the Bombay High Court regarding the matter.

When contacted over the issue, Skoda Auto Volkswagen India said it is availing all legal remedies in response to the show cause notice as permitted under the law.

PHOTO: X

"Skoda Auto Volkswagen India is committed to operating as a responsible organisation, ensuring full compliance with all applicable global and local laws and regulations," it added.

"Compliance with regulatory requirements is one of the company's fundamental principles, and we are cooperating fully with the authorities on this matter," it stated. The Volkswagen group is currently led in India by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India. —*PTI*

STEEPEST IN 14 YEARS

India's manufacturing at 6-month high

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

India's manufacturing sector began 2025 on a robust note, experiencing its highest growth in six months during January, driven by a remarkable surge in exports, as revealed by a recent monthly survey.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) climbed from December's one-year low of 56.4 to 57.7 in January, marking the fastest increase in new export orders since February 2011. In PMI terminology, a figure above 50 signifies expansion, while a score below indicates contraction.

"India's final manufacturing PMI reached a six-month high in January, bolstered by strong domestic and export demand that fostered growth in new orders," commented Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC. Manufacturers attributed the significant uptick in new orders to improved domestic demand and a rise in international sales.

PHOTO: X

This positive trend encouraged producers to ramp up production volumes, with the latest increase being the most substantial since October 2024. Optimism for future output prospects grew, with nearly 32 per cent of firms anticipating growth, while only 1 per cent expected a downturn.

The survey also highlighted robust job creation within the manufacturing sector, as the employment PMI rose to its highest level since the series began. Although input cost inflation eased for the second consecutive month, contributing to a slowdown in pressure to raise final output prices, selling prices saw a solid increase due to buoyant demand. —*PTI*

OpenAi launches new AI tool for ChatGPT

CALIFORNIA, 3 FEB

OpenAI has launched a new Artificial Intelligence tool, "Deep Research," designed to conduct independent research and generate detailed reports quickly. This announcement comes alongside CEO Sam Altman's scheduled meetings in Tokyo with Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba and SoftBank chief Masayoshi Son.

Deep Research significantly reduces the time for complex research tasks, completing in minutes what would typically take hours. It can search, analyze, and compile information from online sources, offering insights similar to those of professional analysts.

During a live demonstration, OpenAI showcased the tool's ability to push ski equipment for a Japanese holiday, highlighting its capacity to process web content, images, and PDFs, refining search results.

Built on OpenAI's latest reasoning model o3, Deep Research is available through ChatGPT Pro, with plans for wider access. Despite limitations in source interpretation, OpenAI sees it as a game-changer for fields like finance, science and law. —*Agencies*

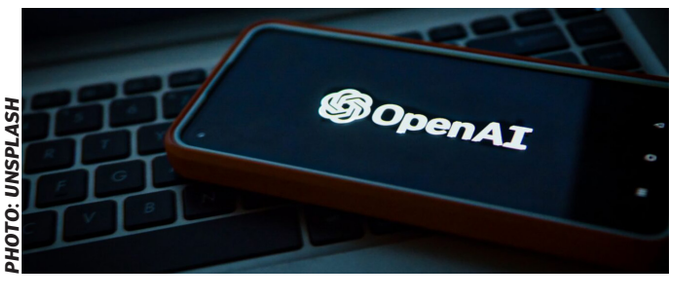


PHOTO: UNSPLASH

PHOTO:WIKIPEDIA

Samson fractures index finger, out of action for 6 weeks

NEW DELHI, 3 FEB

Star wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson has fractured his index finger after being hit by a Jofra Archer scorcher during the fifth T20 International against England in Mumbai and will be out of action for more than a month, side-lining him from the upcoming Ranji Trophy quarterfinals. It is learnt that Sanju has returned to his home base Thiruvananthapuram and will only start training after completing his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy (NCA). he would need NCA's green light before returning to competitive action. Samson, who had a poor series against England and is not a part of the ODI set-up, was hit off the third ball bowled by Archer which was close to 150 clicks. Samson will have to wait considerably for his next opportunity, which would be an away series against Bangladesh. *—PTI*

Badminton squad attends camp ahead of Asia Mixed

New Delhi, 3 Feb

The Indian badminton contingent, including top players like PV Sindhu and Lakshya Sen, are set to join a five-day preparatory camp in Guwahati on Tuesday ahead of the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championships. Having clinched a bronze at the 2023 edition, the Indian team will be aiming to improve on their performance, scheduled to take place in Qingdao, China, from 11-16 February. Two-time Olympic medalist Sindhu and Paris Olympics semi-finalist Lakshya Sen will lead a 14-member Indian squad, which also features Asian Games gold medalists Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, along with HS Prannoy, a World and Asian Games bronze medallist. The Indian squad is set to depart for the tournament on 8 February. *—PTI*

Gayle, Ntini & Panesar to join Int'l Masters League

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

Former cricketers Chris Gayle, Makhaya Ntini and Monty Panesar will line up to compete in the upcoming inaugural edition of the International Masters League, which begins on 22 February. The competition will be held in Navi Mumbai, Rajkot and Raipur from 22 February to 16 March. "The IML is a fantastic platform to relive those big moments and share the stage with some of the best in the game. I'm ready to bring the Universe Boss energy to this league," Gayle said in a statement, while Ntini said "Cricket fans are in for a treat." India great Yuvraj Singh had earlier confirmed his availability for the tournament which will feature six teams; India, Sri Lanka, West Indies, South Africa, Australia and England.*—PTI*

Ronaldo ready for Asian Champions before 40th b-day

RIYADH, 3 FEB

Cristiano Ronaldo turns 40 on Wednesday but is showing few signs of slowing down as he prepares to lead Saudi club Al-Nassr against Al-Wasl in the Asian Football Confederation's Champions League Elite. The Portuguese star, who signed for the Riyadh club in Dec 2022, leads the Saudi Pro League scoring charts with 15 goals in 17 games. If Ronaldo can reproduce that form in the continental tournament then Al-Nassr, which has already qualified, has a chance to become Asian champion for the first time. "The best birthday gift for Ronaldo is to achieve victory against Al-Wasl," Al-Nassr coach Stefano Pioli said ahead of the Monday meeting. "It is an important match for us and we want the three points."*—PTI*

Pragg beats Gukesh to win Tata Chess title

The teenager became 1st Indian after Anand to win the title

Indian prodigy R Praggnanandhaa poses with the trophy after winning the Tata Steel Chess Masters 2025 over World Champion D Gukesh, in Wijk aan Zee, Netherlands *PHOTO: PTI*

WIJK AAN ZEE, 3 FEB

The Indian juggernaut in international chess remained unstoppable as Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa fought through exhaustion and nerves to defeat world champion D Gukesh in a clash of compatriots to clinch the Tata Steel Masters title for the first time in his prolific career.

The bespectacled 19-year-old from Chennai, a city that has become the cradle of Indian chess, came from behind to upstage the 18-year-old world number three 2-1 in the tie-breaker of the event's 87th edition here on Sunday.

This was after both players ended up tied on 8.5 points after losing their 13th-round games. While Gukesh lost to fellow Indian Arjun Erigaisi, Praggnanandhaa went down to Vincent Keymer of Germany.

"I am still shaking, it was such a crazy day. I don't know how to express. I didn't really expect to win. Somehow things went my way," Praggnanandhaa told the official tournament website after his triumph.

Asked if it was the most tense day of his chess career, which began when he was a mere two years of age.

"Today is more special because I won the tournament. Definitely most stressful day," he responded.

The teenager became the first Indian after Viswanathan Anand to win the title. Anand won it thrice (2003, 2004 and 2006) individually when it was called the Corus Chess Tournament, named on the title sponsor of that time. The legend also shared the honours twice (1989 and 1998) in its earliest form of Hoogovens Tournament.

Praggnanandhaa faced the Benoni with reversed colours in the first game of the tie-break and it seemed like he had equalised easily in the middle game.

However, Gukesh had other thoughts as he kept trying and won, thanks to a blunder by Praggnanandhaa that cost him a full rook. *—PTI*

EMERGING CRICKET STAR

Abhishek Sharma: Fearless cricket & Yuvraj's impact

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

At just 24 years old, India's emerging cricket star Abhishek Sharma is already making waves in T20 cricket, thanks to his unwavering self-belief and fearlessness. Since debuting on the international stage less than a year ago, the Punjab batter has shattered records, including achieving the joint-third fastest T20I century for an Indian (46 balls) in just his second match. His latest achievement came with a remarkable 37-ball century against England, marking his second T20I ton.

Abhishek credits his success to the guidance of Yuvraj Singh, who has played a pivotal role in his development. "Yuvi Paaji believed in me, and when someone like him says you are going to play for the country, it boosts your confidence," Abhishek stated after scoring an impressive 135 runs off 54 balls, surpassing Shubman Gill's previous T20I record.

Support from the Indian team management has also bolstered Abhishek's confidence. He reflected on coaches and players encouraging him to play freely and assured him of their backing, which he considers vital motivation. Additionally, cricket legend Brian Lara's advice to focus on playing shots without worrying about getting out has proven beneficial in refining his approach.

With his promising talent and the right mentorship, Abhishek Sharma's rapid ascent in T20 cricket looks set to continue as he sets his sights on breaking even more records. *—PTI*

MI Cape Town clinches SA20 record

CAPE TOWN, 3 FEB

MI Cape Town secured a commanding 95-run victory over the Pretoria Capitals on Saturday, becoming the first team to finish with a flawless record in the SA20. At Newlands, they accumulated 201/5 in their allotted 20 overs before restricting the Capitals to 106 in just 14 overs.

The match was highlighted by Sediqullah Atal and Connor Esterhuizen's remarkable 133-run stand for the opening wicket, with Atal hitting 77 off 46 balls and Esterhuizen scoring 69 off 43 balls.

Dane Piedt impressed in his SA20 debut, claiming 3/28 and earning the Player of the Match award, as MI Cape Town's spinners, including Thomas Kaber and George Linde, combined to dismiss the Capitals for a low 106.

"We've been humbled by the support," said MI Cape Town's captain, Colin Ingram. "Team has come together, and we'll maintain our momentum". *—PTI*

Gambir: Want high-risk, high-reward T20 cricket

MUMBAI, 3 FEB

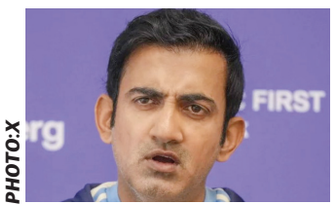


PHOTO:X

India's head coach Gautam Gambhir has announced a bold new strategy in T20 Internationals, prioritising a "high-risk, high-reward" style. The team aims to consistently target scores of 250-260 runs, a shift that was on display during their recent 4-1 series victory over England.

In the fourth T20I in Pune, India aggressively set a winning total of 181, while in their latest match in Mumbai, they soared to 247 for 9, marking their fourth highest score in the format. "We don't want to fear losing a game; we want to play high-risk cricket. The players have embraced this mindset well," Gambhir told broadcasters after the match.

He acknowledged that striving for such lofty totals may lead to disappointing scores in some matches, stating, "In trying to get to 250-260, we might get bowled out for 120-130 occasionally. T20 cricket necessitates that risk to reap big rewards."

Gambhir highlighted the importance of selflessness and fearlessness in the team's philosophy and specifically praised Abhishek Sharma for his explosive 135 off 54 balls. He also commended spinner Varun Chakravarthy, the series' leading wicket-taker with 14 at an average of 9.85, for his impressive transformation from IPL to international cricket.

Amidst recent controversies, Gambhir believes that success will unify the squad, stating, "When results go your way, everything clicks into place." *—PTI*

CT INDIA TOUR CONCLUDES

The ICC Champions Trophy trophy tour concluded in India, visiting Mumbai and Bengaluru before the tournament kicks off on 19 February in Pakistan and Dubai. The event saw India captain Rohit Sharma posing with the trophy alongside former India captains Dilip Vengsarkar, Ravi Shastri, Ajinkya Rahane and ICC Hall of Famers Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar and Diana Edulji. Meanwhile, tickets for India's group-stage matches and the first semifinal go on sale from Monday evening *PHOTO: X/@ICC*

Veer finishes tied 49 in Bahrain, will play DPWT

BAHRAIN, 3 FEB

India's Veer Ahlawat put together a gritty 1-under 71, his third under par round in four days, to finish the 2025 Bahrain Championship at 4-under and tied-49th. As a result of an alliance between the PGTI and the DP World Tour, the OOM winner gets a card to play on the DPWT.

It was a modest finish after his T-27 in Ras Al Khaimah, but Veer showed that he was getting used to the elite Tour, which he got into by topping the PGTI Order of Merit in 2024. The 28-year-old DLF Academy golfer birdied four times in the final round with the gains coming from second, eighth, ninth and the 17th. He dropped shots on third, 13th and the 16th. His earlier rounds were 70-70-73.

Veer is slated to play the Qatar Masters next and he will be joined by Shubhankar Sharma, on DPWT. *—PTI*

Arsenal beats Man City by 5-1, Man U loses

LONDON, 3 FEB

Arsenal's Kai Havertz, center, celebrates scoring his side's 4th goal during the English Premier League soccer in London *PHOTO: X*

The Premier League woes continued for both Manchester City and Manchester United as they faced heavy defeats on Sunday. City suffered a humiliating 5-1 loss at Arsenal, with the result leaving them a daunting 15 points behind league leaders Liverpool. After conceding early, City's Erling Haaland equalised in the 55th minute, but Arsenal surged ahead again through Thomas Partey, followed by goals from Myles Lewis-Skelly, Kai Havertz, and Ethan Nwaneri.

John Stones expressed frustration, stating, "How we played in the last 30 minutes is not acceptable." Meanwhile, Manchester United fell 2-0 at home to Crystal Palace, with Jean-Philippe Mateta scoring both goals in the second half. United's plight worsened as Lisandro Martinez was stretchered off with a serious knee injury, marking their seventh defeat at Old Trafford this season— a statistic not seen since the 1890s.

- Despite United's struggles, Tottenham provided a glimmer of hope for North London as they ended a four-match league losing streak with a 2-0 victory over Brentford

Despite United's struggles, Tottenham provided a glimmer of hope for North London as they ended a four-match league losing streak with a 2-0 victory over Brentford, with goals from an own goal by Vitaly Janelt and Pape Sarr. Antonio Conte's side now shifts focus to their crucial League Cup semi-final against Liverpool on Thursday. *—PTI*

Samra, Jonathan clinch gold medals at National Games

DEHRADUN, 3 FEB

Punjab's Sift Kaur Samra and Karnataka's Jonathan Anthony secured gold medals in women's 50m 3 positions and men's 10m pistol events respectively at the ongoing 38th National Games here on Monday.

The 23-year-old Samra, an Asian Games gold medallist, produced a commanding performance to score an impressive 461.2 points to grab the top spot in a competitive final held at Maharana Pratap Sports College here.

"This feels like a comeback for me after the Olympics. I didn't take a break and kept training, so winning gold today feels special," Samra, who couldn't make the finals in Paris Olympics, said.

"I'm pleased with how I executed my routine and the small details that made the difference. It's also wonderful to share the podium with Anjum, who's an incredible shooter."

Her fellow state-mate Anjum Moudgil, also from Punjab, claimed the silver medal with 458.7 points, while Telangana's Surabhi Bhardwaj Rapole took bronze with a 448.8.

In men's 10m pistol final, Anthony delivered a standout performance, clinching the gold medal. *—PTI*

PHOTO:X

U-19 Women's WC: 4 in ICC Team of the Tournament

KUALA LUMPUR, 3 FEB

India's women's under-19 team has been named the best in the world after their impressive victory in the recent T20 World Cup in Kuala Lumpur. The team, who retained their title by defeating South Africa by nine wickets in the final, has been dominated by four Indian players in the ICC's 'Team of the Tournament'.

G Trisha, who was named the Player of the Tournament, was the top run-scorer in the competition, hitting 309 runs, including a century against Scotland. Her average of 77.25 and strike rate of 147 made her a formidable force on the field.

Trisha's opening partner, G Kamalini, also made it to the team with her impressive performances, including an unbeaten 56 against England in the semifinals. The left-arm spin duo of Vaishnavi Sharma and Ayushi Shukla completed the Indian quartet in the team.

South Africa's Jemma Botha, England's Davina Perrin, and Australia's Caoimhe Bray were also included. *—PTI*

MORE THAN 10% DROP

Germany's beer sales dip despite Euro C'ship

BERLIN, 3 FEB

PHOTO:FREEPIK

German beer sales declined last year even as the country hosted the European Football Championship, continuing a long-term downward trend that has seen sales drop by more than 10 per cent in the past decade to their lowest level since at least the early 1990s.

Official figures released Monday showed that German-based breweries and distributors sold about 8.3 billion litres of beer last year, which was a 1.4 per cent decline on the previous year. The figure doesn't include non-alcoholic beer and beer imported from outside the European Union (EU).

The latest figure was not as steep as the 4.5 per cent drop seen in 2023, when sales resumed their downward slide after a recovery at home and in the EU following the end of Covid-19 restrictions. But, after years in which sales have mostly dropped, they were 13.7 per cent lower last year than they were in 2014, the Federal Statistical Office said.

- The latest figure was not as steep as the 4.5 per cent drop seen in 2023, when sales resumed their downward slide following the end of Covid-19 restrictions

German brewers have been struggling with a long-term downward trend fuelled by health concerns and other factors.

Sales inside Germany — which account for more than 80 per cent of the total — dropped 2 per cent last year to 6.8 billion litres. A 1.6 per cent increase in exports, fuelled by a 3.1 per cent rise in sales to other countries in the EU, couldn't compensate for that. Sales to other countries were down 0.3 per cent.

Germany hosted the annual soccer competition, a magnet for beer-drinking fans, in June and July last year. It coincided in part with unusually wet summer weather, which appears to have kept people away from beer gardens.*—PTI*